



[Start Here](#)

This book is dedicated to all the various graduating classes of 2011. Schools are by nature programmed, predictable and sheltered environments. Now, as you enter the “real world,” you will be faced with many options of how to perceive society and your place in it. In actuality, it really just boils down to one overriding choice: Will you let love define your world and influence your actions, or fear?

The eyes of fear want you to put bigger locks on your doors, buy guns, close yourselves off. The eyes of love, instead, see all of us as one. Here's what you can do to change the world, right now, to a better ride. Take all that money that we spend on weapons and defense each year, and instead spend it feeding, clothing and educating the poor of the world, which it would many times over, not one human being excluded, and we could explore space, together, both inner and outer, forever, in peace. - Bill Hicks

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Introduction

Perhaps you are a Seeker.

Seekers often feel empty and unfulfilled when existing in a world of underlying fear, routine and consumption. They are disillusioned with the models of success and achievement that have been promoted by Western society. In this age of uncertainty, many younger Seekers may wonder if they will ever feel the peace or security of their parents' generation. In the back of their minds, Seekers feel that there is some greater purpose to their existence; something that has been forgotten or lost in our culture that is keeping us all from realizing our spiritual connectedness and personal inner peace.

The spiritual journey of the Seeker must, by necessity, require the individual to venture into unfamiliar territory. The path is different for everyone, but various life experiences will lead Seekers to open their eyes to the greater workings of the world, at least for fleeting moments.

Some people will learn to keep their eyes open. The walls of their egos will dissolve. They will discover how to objectively think for themselves and draw their own conclusions about all aspects of their reality. Before long, they will become active participants in the creation of their own reality, rather than being victims of circumstance. This is easier said than done, and requires a great deal of strength and

integrity.

The journey itself is framed by a string of revelations that go straight from the heart to the head. One of the most important of these revelations can be encouraged by studying the illustration on the cover of this book.

When you look at it, what do you see?

Is it a man or a woman? Is the person dying, being consumed by the fire? Are they being born, rising up from the flames? What is the artist's intention? What do the people around you think? What does it all mean?

There is no correct answer. Whatever meaning you are taking from the artwork, you are creating for yourself. The artist's intention is mere trivia, as are the opinions of those around you.

You are solely in charge of your perception and interpretation of the world around you at all times. Understanding this fact forces you to take responsibility for your own reality. You can no longer pretend to be a victim. Things will not happen to you anymore, you will happen to things. A Seeker who understands this crucial principle is already well on their way to finding inner peace and happiness.

The title of the book is also worth a closer inspection. To Seekers who are just beginning their journey, the title can be taken at face value. Just "Start Here." Even if you find that

you disagree with every philosophical concept presented herein, it is as good of a place to start the conversation as any. If you find anything offensive, it is worth asking yourself, WHY? You may discover more, questioning an idea, than someone who read the text and has agreed with it. This book does not claim to have all the answers – its intention is to stimulate thoughts and arguments in an ongoing search for truths.

For Seekers who are farther down their respective paths, the title takes on an all-together different meaning. At some point, you will have had a moment of clarity. It is a mental state without ego. In that moment, you feel balanced, at peace, and connected to the energies around you that make up your world. If you are at a place in your journey where you understand your ability to recreate that past perception of reality in any present moment, the title serves as a reminder to always consciously “Start Here,” if you find that you have slipped back into negative patterns.

This is version 1.0 of this book. You are encouraged to visit the website, where each individual chapter awaits your comments and contributions. The intention is to constantly be updating and rereleasing this book as an ongoing collaborative project. Whether you agree or disagree with the ideas presented here, your input is extremely valuable. Go to <http://startherefreebook.blogspot.com/> to get started!

A Prison For Your Mind

Morpheus: Let me tell you why you're here. You're here because you know something. What you know you can't explain, but you feel it. You've felt it your entire life, that there's something wrong with the world. You don't know what it is, but it's there, like a splinter in your mind, driving you mad. It is this feeling that has brought you to me. Do you know what I'm talking about?

Neo: The Matrix.

Morpheus: Do you want to know what it is?

Neo: Yes.

Morpheus: The Matrix is everywhere. It is all around us. Even now, in this very room. You can see it when you look out your window or when you turn on your television. You can feel it when you go to work... when you go to church... when you pay your taxes. It is the world that has been pulled over your eyes to blind you from the truth.

Neo: What truth?

Morpheus: That you are a slave, Neo. Like everyone else you were born into bondage. Into a prison that you cannot taste or see or touch. A prison for your mind. - The Matrix

In order to see beyond the prison for your mind, you must first be conscious that you are in a prison - that your mind has never been entirely freed for whatever reason.

We are all raised in a culture that seems very normal to us most of the time. Not

everyone feels the need to look for possibilities that might exist outside of that box for finding happiness or meaning. Some people may never see the bars of their cages. For many who have found success in the accepted system for many years, their routine seems stable and provides them at least some of the opportunities they desire. Many people are perfectly happy with things staying the way they are. But what if things do not stay the same? What if the agreed upon “reality” was challenged or proven unsustainable? What would happen to their happiness? What about the happiness of people who haven't had traditionally easy or successful lives?

The type of happiness and peace that is found outside the prison of the mind is UNCONDITIONAL. It humbly arises from within and is an endless source of strength, positive energy and love for all those around you. It is an existence that is mindful of the energies of the world. It is infinite and immortal. This state of happiness is not dependent upon any desires being met and is free from anger or worry. Some have called it enlightenment, but the condition is yours to name and understand in your own terms. The path requires you to reevaluate your self image and your perceived values. It involves taking responsibility not just for your actions, but also for your habitual feelings and your own personal patterns. All of your attachments, even to your own life, must be questioned along the journey.

Seekers begin their journey at the point in

their lives when they can start to see the bars and the boundaries of their mental cage. The next step is the realization that the prison has a door, which is always unlocked and open. The only thing that keeps a person inside their mental cage is a guard who blocks the doorway. It is a classic case of schizophrenia - you are both the guard and the prisoner. This is the source of some of life's greatest frustrations. The guard has as much power as you choose to give him. The guard is judgmental, loud and critical. Most of all, he is afraid. He blocks the doorway and offers thousands of excuses as to why it is not a good idea to journey outside the cage:

You might not meet the expectations of your friends, family, or peers in society. It is easier to procrastinate. It will require too much hard work and dedication. You might lose sight of who you are in the process.

The guard can not be overpowered. He must be reasoned with. At some point in this process, you may be ready to take the next step. Your internal argument will have dissipated and everything boils down to just one last question. Do you believe that life outside the cage will be better or more rewarding than staying inside? If you have truly conquered your fear and judgment, then your guard will no longer have any power over you. Only then you can look inside and answer this question for yourself honestly. If your answer is an unqualified yes, it is time to move forward.

Dissatisfaction

Tyler: I see all this potential, and I see squandering. God damn it, an entire generation pumping gas, waiting tables; slaves with white collars. Advertising has us chasing cars and clothes, working jobs we hate so we can buy shit we don't need. We're the middle children of history, man. No purpose or place. We have no Great War. No Great Depression. Our Great War's a spiritual war... our Great Depression is our lives. We've all been raised on television to believe that one day we'd all be millionaires, and movie gods, and rock stars. But we won't. And we're slowly learning that fact. And we're very, very pissed off. – Fight Club

Why do people find it so hard to be satisfied? Why do the little successes of life never seem to be enough? Why do the glories of the larger successes fade so quickly? When we are living at greater levels of luxury and opportunity than any generation that has come before us, why do we find ourselves unhappy and bored? Why do people who consider themselves satisfied, often live in fear of losing what they have?

This egotistical and ungrateful mindset is not human nature. It arises as a manifestation of our cultural attitude. Modern Western culture is a complicated mixture of outlooks and approaches to life, but it can be viewed at its core as a culture based on consumption and driven by dissatisfaction.

Because it goes hand in hand with consumption, dissatisfaction has evolved in our culture to be our default state. Feelings of dissatisfaction directly fuel our consumption. If everyone suddenly became humbled and easily satisfied overnight, no one would feel the need to consume and participate in such a culture as ours. In order to discourage such a spiritual journey, our culture implies that we are always supposed to be asking ourselves what we still want or think we need. We are constantly attempting to “make things better” for ourselves, and things could always be better. People dream about increasing their finances and ability to consume. We are never supposed to finish this race. We are never supposed to question that consumption and growth is the purpose of our species.

Certain modern cultural memes that seem obvious and commonplace to us are actually very unnatural in the scope of human history. We need to consider the implications of these relatively new human behavior choices, especially in regard to how these practices contribute to our personal isolation in society. Feelings of separateness and inadequacy have evolved in our culture. Like dissatisfaction, they encourage consumption and predictability. People who feel isolated in society, away from community or tribal support, feel empowered instead by their consumption and personal ambition.

The idea that every individual should strive to have their own house for just them (and

sometimes their immediate family) is really just a recent development in the grand scheme of things. The fact that extended families are often separated across the country by great distances is also taken for granted – but this is also a relatively new concept in our society that impacts important relationships and personal security. For most of humanity's tenure on this planet, to split up families or tribes or to go out completely on one's own was unheard of. Tribal cultures of the past would be shocked by the way in which we live today and would see clearly the detrimental aspects that such choices bring about. Societies that are tribal in nature offer a sort of cradle-to-grave security for its members, with special bonds formed in tradition as well as a stress upon cooperation over competition. These days, many people don't trust or even know their neighbors.

Instead, fueled by dissatisfaction and isolation, people feel that they have something to prove. Our society provides an outlet for this drive. People learn at an early age that they should work hard, find their place in the world and accumulate wealth and power. Many are successful in reaching the goals promoted by our society. Yet a good number of these people still feel that they are unhappy or that they never have enough. Clearly, something is still missing from their lives. Others, who do feel legitimately happy with their current situation, would quickly find their lives turned upside down if they lost their wealth or power. Sometimes, just the fear of losing one's status is enough to wreck the false security that "successful" people have

achieved. In other words, the path to happiness that is provided by our culture is not very secure or successful, and yet is rarely questioned.

The recognition of the inherent dissatisfaction in our culture is an important step in personal growth. The next step is to realize that your level of participation in our culture is your own choice.

You do not have to identify with any of the roles or expectations that society has for you. You may choose to ignore all advertizing and trends. You can discipline yourself not to seek happiness through shopping or the procurement of wealth.

Ask yourself if your personal values are reflected in a society based upon consumption. Remember that the purpose behind such a culture is not to be peaceful, fair, or sustainable. The purpose of the culture is to make money for specific groups of people and to subjugate the rest. It does not contain a true path to happiness for all participants.

Cultural Insecurity

A simple renunciation of consumer culture is not going to lead to happiness, though. Many other aspects of our culture that we take for granted are also contributing to our collective depression. There is a serious vibration of insecurity that resonates throughout our experiment in civilization. Our isolation from one another is a very visible component of this insecurity, but many other contributing aspects of our society are not as easily observed. When one becomes aware of the reasons for the insecurity in our collective unconscious, the resulting fears can be understood and overcome.

Most people are unaware of how fragile our way of life really is - but they can feel it. Clearly, the structure of our society is very complex. This gives a false illusion of security. It seems like it would be very hard for the whole of civilization to crumble overnight. However, what appears to be a very complex system is actually extremely organized and therefore has a great deal of fragility.

An example of a more secure system would be the ecosystem of a swamp. The web of life is intricately connected and adaptable in a swamp. It is complex as well, but in a different way. It is an example of organized chaos that has evolved over a great deal of time. Our situation in Western Civilization resembles something very different: painstakingly organized dominoes. This system is not chaotic,

nor did it evolve naturally. All the work that humanity has done in order to make our society run smoothly, especially over the last 200 years or so, has actually contributed to our instability. If one domino falls - for example, if we have a serious oil supply shortage – everything else goes down almost immediately.

Other factors that lie just out of plain sight are also contributing to our cultural insecurity. In the not too distant past, almost all technology was transparent. You might not be able to make your own Colt Revolver, but anyone could look at one and have a pretty good understanding of how the trigger worked the levers and caused the bullet to fire. The same goes for most of the tools or inventions of the time. You could look at a shelter and comprehend on a working level just about every aspect of technology used in its construction, maintenance and everyday use. In today's society, the technologies and gadgets that we depend upon every day - the home computer, climate control, the automobile - are so complicated that most people are very unlikely to understand exactly how everything is working. In essence, we have become slaves to our contraptions and, at the same time, feel that there is no way to live without them. Without us even understanding exactly why, this fact also contributes to our modern insecurity. We feel more helpless than ever when we can't depend on ourselves or our own knowledge base.

We live in a time of great luxury, without question. However, the sacrifices that have been made to obtain this lifestyle have cost us a

great deal of our security. In order to continue living in a way that most Americans would call "normal," constant continued growth is required. We need continued economic growth.

Continued expansion of suburbs. More food supplies. More credit. And all of this requires a greater consumption of energy, which in turn requires more non-renewable resources. For various reasons, people are starting to wake up now to the fact that this type of growth is unsustainable, even on a relatively short timeline. For some, it was the events of 9/11 (no matter who was behind it) that first signaled this fragility. For others, it came when the housing bubble burst and credit dried up at the banks. No matter how the conclusion has been reached, though, our attachment to our lifestyle needs to be questioned. Does more luxury really lead to more happiness? Can one really find security, peace, and comfort by putting their faith into something that they know is inherently unsustainable?

Impermanence and Attachment

Our culture cultivates personal attachments to possessions, self image, and perceptions of reality. All such attachments provide unnecessary pre-requisites for happiness. When someone's attachments are challenged – if their possessions are taken away, if their reputation is tarnished, or if their belief system is called into question – the emotional impact is usually quite negative. Even at other times, when the need created by an attachment is actually being met, there is an underlying insecurity that comes from the fact that nothing is ever permanent. We need to accept impermanence in order to deny attachments their power over us and to have a freed mind.

Change is inevitable and is always ongoing. All matter is constantly in a state of decay. All monuments will someday crumble. We all continue to grow older and will all die some day. There is no reason to mentally fight with these simple, unchangeable facts. If you give in to the changing flow of things, enjoying when things go your way and quickly accepting when they do not, happiness will always be yours to experience. If you fight against the flow, you will perceive your life as filled with stress and hardship.

People are also commonly attached to things that they enjoy doing, in the form of diversions. We could be talking about just about anything; video games, sports, the internet,

music, shopping, or food. Any judgment of these diversions has been reserved. In moderation, just about any experience can be an interesting and enriching part of life. The main issue at hand is the *attachment* to these diversions. When a new technology or experience becomes available and suddenly people “can’t live without it,” they instantly forget that all of humanity prior to that moment in history somehow managed to do so.

This doesn’t mean that people should abandon all pursuit of new experiences or to stop taking pleasure from diversions. It just means that impermanence needs to be figured in to the equation. In other words, enjoy your golf game in the moment as you are playing it. At the same time, let go of any thoughts that tell you that your life would be miserable if you never played again. The same logic can be applied to all your material possessions, including your money supply. Taking enjoyment from your possessions is not a problem, as long as you do not feel attachment to them or fear of their loss.

One of the strongest unconscious attachments that is encouraged in our culture, is that of the individual to his or her own self image or ego. The attachment to the ego is the primary obstacle one must overcome in order to realize the SINGULARITY. This is the term that we will be using to describe the understanding that we are all one, exchanging energies, in a manifestation of a singular consciousness. This issue will be addressed in much greater detail in

later sections, but it is worth mentioning here as well.

We are attached to an idea of “who we are.” We are attached to stories of our past that explain “why things are.” We are attached to projections of the future that explain “the way things should be.” We are attached to our religious beliefs, cultural morality, and to the opinions of others. It is important to learn to question all of these attachments without the instantaneous fear that easily arises in such a situation. The mind without ego attachments can see clearly that:

There is no reason we need to define “who we are” to anyone – especially ourselves.

Our actions in the past do not have to be connected to our choices in the present.

Fighting the natural unfolding of the future only leads to pain.

Religious or spiritual beliefs should not be fixed in place. They need to constantly grow and evolve as things are learned through life experiences.

It is not a good idea to just accept the conventional wisdom, nor is it a good idea to never question your own learned values.

Your personal happiness comes from inside you and does not depend on the thoughts or actions of others.

Perhaps the hardest attachments to overcome are the ones we have to the lives of our loved ones. It can initially be hard to see why this should be either necessary or even desired. Isn't this one of the things that "makes us human?" For starters, it is absolutely crucial to note that loving without attachment is not a lesser form of love, nor does it imply that the death of a loved one is insignificant. It simply implies that you are prepared to humbly accept the sometimes random or inevitable events of the universe as they play out, and that you are willing to maintain your responsibility to both yourself and others in regards to putting out constructive and positive energy. Even during the hardest initial periods of mourning, the lives of the departed can be celebrated by the people who live on. The impact that loved people have had during their life will reverberate through all time. Comfort can be taken from this simple fact.

It is up to the individual to decide how quickly they wish to move through the stages of grief and begin to celebrate the life of the person who has passed, instead of just painfully mourning the loss. The grieving parties may feel depressed and helpless. These emotions can be very real - but how to act upon these emotions can always be a mindful choice made by the survivors.

Love without attachment is possible and not as heartless as it may initially appear on paper. In fact, it is a healthier form of love that is

not co-dependent or possessive of others. Telling yourself that you can't be complete without particular people in your life is going to set a condition for your happiness, as well as force a denial of the inevitable flow of the universe. This is not a battle that can be won and it need not be fought.

Entitlement

In modern day America, we have a very special attachment to our way of life and have developed a dangerous sense of entitlement as a result. Starting very early with school, we have been conditioned to jump through hoops in order to receive predictable awards.

In general, the mythology of our culture says:

If you get a good education
You can get good job
You can get a good income
You can start a family if you want
And live out your personal version of the
American Dream

If at any stage in this process things are not working out as planned, people tend to get very frustrated. After all, they are doing everything they are supposed to be doing and are therefore entitled to their version of the American Dream. Other people who play by these guidelines and are successful, feel that they deserve their place in society. By that logic, those who have not been successful must be deserving of their failure in some way. In this manner, feelings of entitlement lead to rampant elitism and conflict in America.

People usually feel entitled to a social status equal to, or surpassing the one with which they grew up. They feel entitled to more luxury than previous generations, more technology and more security. Specifically in America, we feel

entitled to our entire lifestyle. It is almost sacrilege to question the morality of our country's disproportionate consumption of resources and energy to the rest of the world.

The time has now come that we need to ask serious questions about these feelings of entitlement and where they are leading us. Satisfaction can be defined as a state of mind in which there are no unmet desires. When one has a sense of entitlement, negative perceptions of the world are encouraged based upon unsatisfied desires. Such patterns clearly do not lead to happiness and should be abandoned with mindful practice.

The current economic situation in the world has put the American Dream out of reach for much of the younger generations. For the first time in decades, forthcoming generations will not be able to expect the same economic conditions that their parents may have enjoyed. Holding on to beliefs of entitlement will only lead to further suffering.

Judgment of Self and Others

All measurements of a successful and happy life are relative. It is up to you to set your own bar and standards. It is not up to your family, friends, or society at large. Our culture, however, encourages constant critical and competitive judgment of both ourselves and everyone around us. Like our sense of entitlement, a judgmental approach to life can only hurt our overall level of happiness.

We live in a very “me oriented” society. Individuality and personal achievement are heavily stressed when discussing personal growth, success and happiness. Competition and subsequent comparison with others is encouraged. People become so used to judging themselves and others, that this method of measurement can feel very real and important. Of course, it is only as real and as important and you decide.

The ways in which we judge each other are based on the DIFFERENCES we perceive between people and is ignorant of the fact that everyone's experience of life is almost completely the same across all time and all cultures. We all share the same set of feelings, desires for love and peace and all have the same basic needs as human beings. Even the sociopath who makes constant negative choices is still doing it in a selfish way to feel peace.

It is both possible and crucial to transcend the shallow judgment of self and others and to

focus instead on all that we have in common as living beings. True peace of mind and spirit comes in the realization that we are all one together and that there is no “other” – no “us” and no “them” anywhere in human history.

In the end, how we choose to perceive the people in the world around us really comes down to a choice at an individual level of love vs. fear. Do we love our fellow man and treat him as we would want to be treated as part of a community, or do we fear and judge the others around us and throw ourselves into competition for power and resources? Which path leads to true happiness?

Personality and Ego

In American culture, a great deal of emphasis is placed on individuality. People are encouraged to realize what makes them special and then they are encouraged to make their existential mark on the world. The main drawback of this type of thinking is that it stresses the DIFFERENCES between people, while ignoring the common existence and experiences as human beings on planet Earth. The ego of the individual is being overly stressed. One's personality is not made up of likes and dislikes or the predictability of behavior. This criterion reflects more of one's ego and individual experiences than "personality." Personality is more about one's choices in life than it is about specific preferences or actions.

No one's personality is set in stone. On some level people are choosing to feel and act in predictable ways, day after day. People become addicted to their own patterns (and egos) and many moment to moment choices are made unconsciously out of habit. A large step in the realization of the Singularity is to become mindful of all actions, to see beyond one's ego, and to stop acting without thinking.

Every action or reaction in life depends on three intertwined factors that make up one's "personality": Security, Awareness, and Integrity.

Security:

Security is a measure on average of how much peace and balance the individual feels moment to moment. If one is living peacefully in the moment, they are not concerning themselves with things that have happened in the past, nor are they worrying about the future. In a secure and humbled mind, the facade of ego becomes clear for what it really is. The highest levels of security are reachable through focused meditation.

An abundance of security is experienced as love for others and peace in the mind. Lack of it leads to fear, which leads to all negative emotions. Insecurity and the subsequent fear are behind all negative, destructive, or selfish behaviors. In fact, all emotions and the resulting behaviors reflect one's security in one way or another.

Security is derived from associations with people whom you love and care about, the ability to not worry about that which can not be changed, and the knowledge that one is doing their best in all situations. Security must always come from within – it can not be dependent upon the actions or approval of others.

Awareness:

There are two types of awareness: Awareness of inner space, and awareness of outer space.

Your awareness of inner space is a measurement of how you perceive reality behind

the wall of your ego. Can you separate your ego from what/who you really are? Are you in control of your emotions? Are you a victim of circumstances, or do you approach every situation in a peaceful, positive mood no matter what? Are you aware of your own attachments, desires, and hang ups? Are you aware of your own powers to create the world around you and take control of your attitude and choices every moment of every day?

Awareness of outer space has to do with the depth of your perceptions in regards to external stimuli. For example:

There is a book sitting on a shelf. When you look at this book, you make an unconscious choice while observing it and determining what it is and what it represents. How deep do you want to go?

LEVEL 1: There is a book on the shelf.

LEVEL 2: The book contains information or stories that some may find valuable or interesting.

LEVEL 3: The paper on which it is printed and the chemicals involved were likely damaging to the environment during its manufacture.

LEVEL 4: The system in place that prints books, distributes them worldwide, and then advertises them for mass consumption is energy intensive and unsustainable.

Etc...

It is important to note that judgment has been reserved at all levels. These are just

factual observations and not conclusions. There is no right and wrong to debate and no right level to reach. All arguments are subjective and can't possibly address all aspects of anything in its entirety. That doesn't mean that choices are not being made by the observer, though.

Of course, we observe a lot more than books on a shelf. We make choices about how deeply we want to observe the fast food industry, America's car culture, fashion trends, global politics, and everything else that makes up modern life.

Integrity:

Regardless of how secure one may feel, how humble they may be, or how deeply they choose to look while observing the world – choices have been made and revelations have been had. Integrity is a measurement of how we choose to act, knowing what we have chosen to know. Are your thoughts, convictions, and actions in sync? Do you make excuses for behavior you know to be in violation of your principals?

People who are ignorant but living with integrity are far more common than people who are wise and are living by their convictions. In a society that is so complex, integrity is not an easy trait to maintain.

No one personality should be ranked against another. No judgment needs to ever be passed. However, it can be understood that

personal security, awareness, and integrity are what make up personality and are thereby the basis for all our decisions and how we feel afterwards. It should also be noted that these factors are within our control when we choose to discipline our minds and happiness awaits those who make the commitment to try and lose their ego and approach the world in a positive way.

“It’s getting hard to tell where what I am ends, and what they’re making me begins.” - Eels

Many people believe that their ego exists, that their personality is predetermined to a large part due to their genetics or environment, and that their personality is eternal – perhaps in the form of a soul. People nurture their ego as it develops. Growing up, this is heavily encouraged in our culture. Find out who you are! Be yourself!

When certain negative thoughts, behaviors, or actions arise, people will just excuse their patterns by saying “That’s just me” and will take no real responsibility. Often people are afraid to question the origins or validity of their beliefs and also feel that their experiences have “made them who they are.” On a certain level, this is true. Our experiences certainly do play a major role in the development of our personal patterns. However, you must take responsibility for your thought patterns and realize that just because you can understand how your habits were formed, does not mean that you can’t put forward an effort to change for the better or take control of your feelings. To do otherwise is to

play a role as a victim of circumstance and to not realize the full creative potential of your mind.

Becoming Mindful of the Thought Process

One of the first crucial steps that an introspective Seeker must take towards greater insight is to become mindful of their thought process. Our thinking habits and patterns are so ingrained, that many are not even conscious of them at all. For example, consider taste in music. People will often make blanket declarations: "I'll listen to anything but country music." "Rap music is stupid." etc... Not only will these people not seek out these genres of music, but their prejudice will fulfill their own prophecy by not even giving the music a chance when they do encounter it. The moment that a song sounds "too country," they unconsciously tell themselves that they don't like it. In essence, they do not even make the effort to listen. These people are involved in the process of defining themselves simply by their likes and dislikes and are filtering stimuli through this mental image.

Every song (and in the same vein, every stimulus that triggers thought) needs to be evaluated and given a chance on the spot, in that moment. Even if you have heard the exact song before and didn't like it the first time does not mean that you should shut it out. It is part of the moment that you are in and should be experienced anew every time. Tell yourself that there is someone else out in the world who loves that song (movie, book, sport, or ANYTHING) and try to discover something about it that they appreciate. Let go of your expectations, judgments, and self image. Do not dismiss

anything in the moment.

When people define themselves based on their preferences, they are not really showing “who they really are.” Instead, they are simply showing the point where they close their mind to things that they have learned to reject. Taste in music is hardly the key issue here. Many people feel that in order to define themselves, they need to draw lines at what they find offensive. This is where it becomes especially important to be mindful. Almost all offense is learned. The emotions connected to it are real – but when someone takes offense to something, it is really just evidence of a closed mind and a lack of mindfulness. Occurrences in life may still be seen as having positive or negative influences, but just like the music example above, people have to be careful to experience every idea or happening anew in the moment.

A big part of being mindful of your thought process is to increase the time between taking in the information or situation and reacting to it. Try to break the habit of having an instant or automatic emotional reaction to anything. If a friend or relative is a victim of a violent crime, like a rape, it is easy to be offended and move instantly to an “appropriate” response of anger. Most people would not question this thought process in the least. However, when you slow down the process long enough to avoid this emotional habit, it becomes clear that there are many other, more productive emotional CHOICES to be consciously made in response to this event – or any negative event. In the

case of rape, feelings of empathy, compassion, or concern for the victim are more valuable than anger. Someone who has been hurt in that way is in need of healing – and any form of love is going to be more valuable than an expression of anger, fear, or hate. Anger in the moment rarely serves any purpose. It is a form of violence and is self destructive. It is possible to react in a positive way to even the most negative of things. Just because a situation is negative does not require you to react that way. Negative feelings and emotions are detrimental to our being. They do not solve problems and instead become roadblocks that we have to work around.

It's funny how people react when you tell them that there is no excuse to be angry and that negative emotions should not be validated, justified, or sustained. They often get defensive and their egos come right out. "That's the way I am and that's the way I feel!" "I can't deny what I feel inside!" This may feel true for that person in that moment. However, they are not aware of their own habits or how to break them.

An understanding of how the brain works and how we learn, can shed some light on this topic. The brain processes information through a series of interconnected neurons. How the neurons line up and fire have to do with past patterns that have been reinforced. Any sort of stimulus can trigger a series of neurons that have intertwined based on past experiences. In one brain, for example, the smell of a pine tree could trigger a pathway of neurons that connects

to fond memories of summer camp and then to feelings of peace and security. Someone who has had different life experiences could have a different series of connections triggered, and the same smell could make them feel insecure or distressed. At first, this example seems to support the concept of individuality – each person seems to have a different brain based upon their personal experiences. However, this ignores a crucial fact about how these neural pathways are formed and the role we play in maintaining them.

Evolution on a species level works very simply. Mutations or variations in a species that are not beneficial to survival tend to disappear over time as the species evolves. The same is true with the neural pathways in the brain as it “evolves” (learns, that is.) When we forget calculus that we learned in high school because it doesn't apply to our everyday lives anymore, it is because the neural pathways that were created at the time are no longer being stimulated and reinforced. That information is no longer “beneficial to survival” and the pathways formed by the neurons firing in sequence will break down over time. The same is true for emotional pathways as well. We might feel exactly the same love for our parents that we felt at age three, because it has been consistently reinforced over the years – but we will not feel the same fear of the monster under our bed, because our increasing understanding of the world has led to the breaking down of those pathways.

The “monster under the bed” situation is a perfect example of how greater understanding and awareness can lead to new patterns in the brain that do not create fear or negativity. One of the greatest mistakes that adults can make is to think that they are no longer learning. Just take a quick look at a shell-shocked war vet who jumps at the sound of a car door slamming, and you will see someone who has recently learned and created a negative neural path in their mind. That is an extreme example, but everyone continues to learn or reinforce what they have learned every day.

Once again, the concept of taking responsibility instead of playing a victim comes into play. The soldier with Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome can go through therapy. With focused effort and practice, he can learn to break even the strongest of negative neural pathways – like the ones that link loud noises with fear for his own life. If that soldier can overcome such a strong instantaneous emotional reaction to a stimulus, surely anyone could learn to take control of their instantaneous negative reactions to anything! Whenever we allow ourselves to feel negative emotions or to go down that path, we are reinforcing the neural and chemical pathways in our brain. We can tell ourselves whatever we want – that the anger is natural or justified – it still is not beneficial to our evolving mind, if our goal is inner peace or enlightenment.

LET IT GO. It really is that simple. The moment that you feel the emotions arise, do not

give them any thought - just focus on letting go and returning to a peaceful state of mind. It will take practice, and you may feel that you are repressing emotions that are natural. But what is "natural" anyway, when we are talking about taking responsibility and forming new patterns? What if the vet with PTSD kept claiming that his reactions were natural?

The beauty of how our brains function, is that changing habits will consistently get easier over time. In other words, every time you let go and do not dwell in negative emotions, the pathways in the mind that lead to such emotions are breaking down. It may take ten minutes to calm down the first time you find yourself in an anger inducing situation. But if there is a real attempt to let go of the negativity, then later it may only take five minutes to calm down. After much practice, you may never even feel the anger at all, and will immediately make positive choices.

Letting go of negativity does not just apply to times that you are feeling angry. Negativity can take lots of forms and none of them are going to be helpful when on the path of clearing your head and searching for peace. Some seemingly innocuous forms of negative expression include sarcasm and gossip. Sarcasm is a symptom of a spoiled and bored society, and gossip is usually motivated by a need to feel superior to someone else. Try going for a week without ever talking about someone who is not within earshot. It is amazing to become aware of how much we like

to constantly express ourselves by commenting on others' tribulations or behaviors. Even mild gossip arises from subtle negative motivations and should be avoided.

Issac Newton's first law of physics is that any body that is at rest, will remain at rest unless acted upon by an external force. To someone who has felt inner peace, even for just a moment, that state of mind is the equivalent of Newton's body at rest. Our duty is to try and remain in that state and to deny external negative forces their power to move us from that mindset. Not allowing your own mind to remain in a natural peaceful state is a very common habit in our culture. In quiet moments, people often unconsciously feel that they need to be thinking or worrying about something; worrying about things that have passed, worrying about the future, worrying that they aren't worrying! It can take real practice to break this cycle. This is done mainly by being mindful and not allowing negative thoughts a chance to play in your head. If it feels good to allow yourself a "harmless" vengeful fantasy in which you tell off an authority figure, that is all the more reason to let it go. We need to break down the neural pathways in the mind that link getting even to feeling good. If something happens that triggers negative thoughts of violence, resentment, or jealousy - immediately let the thought and feeling pass and give it no further attention. None. Like all practiced behaviors, this just keeps getting easier over time.

Negative thinking patterns in many people

are habits, because of how the neural pathways have been reinforced in their mind. This is no different than an addiction. In fact, the same neurotransmitter chemicals are involved in the brain as with addictive drugs. People literally become addicted to their emotional behavior. Acting or reacting in certain ways releases neurotransmitters in ways that our brain has gotten used to. In order to break the addiction (or any addiction), you must first understand that you are an addict - in this case to negative emotional patterns. Then you have to start denying yourself the drug - in this case, you have to stop reinforcing the mental pathways that lead to the chemical release. This is done by being mindful of your triggers for negativity and learning to overcome them.

Mindfulness is especially important when communicating with someone else. As you converse, you are both sending and receiving energy. There are so many ways in conversation in which to send energy; attitude, word choice, volume, inflection, gestures, and so on. It is crucial to remain sensitive as you give and receive energy. It can be helpful to imagine that you are in the room with someone else who is very sensitive; a baby, or someone on a psychedelic drug, like LSD. In the presence of others who are in a sensitive state of mind, we tend to be more mindful of our own actions and energies. If you are communicating with someone who is "strong" or who can "take the joke," it is still important to not give in to negative or violent energies. Even if "that's just the way you normally relate" to the other person.

Remember, you are trying to reset your own patterns, and poor choices reinforce these negative habits.

While it is important to be attentive to the energy you communicate when choosing to speak, it can be even more important to be mindful of your MOTIVATION. People in general tend to talk far more than they have to, and often do so without ever thinking about what motivated them to speak at any given moment. If you suddenly feel the urge to tell a story to someone else, first ask yourself why. Is it because you are trying to impress the person in some way? Is it because something they said reminded you of your story, and you just want to connect and relate to this person? What are you trying to communicate about yourself to the other person with your story? Why? Sometimes motivations arise from negative places. Perhaps you realize that your story may cause conflict between others. Maybe your motivations are passive-aggressive or come out of narcissism or pride. You might be trying to scare someone or put them in their place. In the end, it is up to you to stop and think about whether your motivation to speak is positive or negative and act accordingly. Often, once you are aware of your motivation, it can be more beneficial to communicate the motivation directly, rather than beat around the bush. Tell the other person that you are interested to become closer to them rather than try to impress them with a story.

There are many social pressures that can

influence your mindfulness and subsequent choices. There is the desire to "fit in" to the style of conversation, and personal standards may be lowered to do so. This is a place where questions of your own awareness and integrity are raised. It is inadvisable to just aim high enough to please the sensibilities of those around you. You owe it to yourself to hold yourself to a higher standard than the one that might be encouraged by your family, friends, or immediate company.

There is also the ubiquitous desire to be liked by your peers. Be mindful of this powerful desire as well, and how it may be influencing your choices. It makes sense to want to be liked - it can add to your personal security in a variety of ways. However, this desire is based almost entirely in ego. There is no reason why any two people who have transcended their egos should not be able to be instant friends - regardless of likes, dislikes, or culture. While this may not seem realistic, look at how the jamband music scene (Deadheads, if you will) has functioned for years. At concerts, it is taken for granted that the people there "get it." When it comes to concepts like peace, humility, and good vibes, the Deadhead community has very high standards. If a newcomer to concerts "gets it" on some level, they will find themselves immediately accepted into the fold. It is just like a family or tribe. If they don't "get it", they are more or less accepted anyway, and Deadheads will usually continue to send positive energy to the newbie, hoping that they learn and come around. It is always amusing to see someone

get hugged by a stranger and not know quite how to react. Why should that feel bad at all? Why should anyone draw any negative feelings from such a gesture? Hopefully people who do "naturally" feel uncomfortable in that situation will ask themselves those questions and realize the wall of ego that is keeping them from accepting the positive energy.

Death of the Ego

**"Turn off your mind, relax and float downstream. It is not dying. It is not dying."
- The Beatles**

By this point, it should be clear how our egos get directly in the way of finding inner peace and also cause feelings of isolation and loneliness. Your pride and the defining of your own individuality denies the connection and existence that you share with all other conscious beings on the planet. When you are ready, it is time to allow your ego to die. It is time to become conscious of the Singularity. We are all one.

Waking up every morning as the same person is just a habit. It is a choice. It is unconsciously done for the sake of convenience - not personal or social progress. This is the revelation that you must have in order to move forward. You are not who you have always believed that you are. You are not who others think you are. You just have predictable patterns, which you have chosen to maintain over the years.

Take the image you have of yourself in your mind. It usually is made up of your perceived strengths, weaknesses, likes, dislikes, achievements, and regrets. Let the image go. Give it no weight or meaning. Even supposedly positive feelings, such as pride or self confidence, require you to be judging yourself or others. All forms of judgment must go. Instead,

just be mindful. Evaluate and adjust your behavior in every moment to be humble and positive. One does not become enlightened - one is simply enlightened or not, moment by moment.

This process of letting go can seem scary. Our culture has conditioned us to believe that it is like dying. This is not the case at all. It is much more akin to becoming free from personal or societal constraints. Free to be unconditionally happy. Those who have been involved in your life for many years may not always understand. It is not up to you to make them understand. When they see your newfound energy and peace, they will either come around – or they were never actually your friend in the first place. The path to unconditional happiness is one where you learn not to judge others, nor feel the judgment coming from others. It will always just be “their deal” if they take issue with you.

No matter what anyone else ever says or does to you, it is possible to react in a positive way. You can learn to feel compassion rather than anger. Understanding can arise in place of judgment. With no forces able to interfere with your peace, you can be a body at rest - and can remain at rest.

On the journey through modern life, there are seven common phases through which Seekers pass. These phases begin at birth and there are no guarantees that anyone will make it through all of them. In fact, very few do.

However, the reward at the end, following the death of the ego, is very great. In our culture, the first four phases are where the ego is being built up and still seems to have meaning. In the last three phases, the ego is allowed to die, and enlightenment is achieved.

PHASE I: Getting Educated

This phase encompasses all of childhood learning, including the programming of our culture. Children at this stage are learning how to learn, and not necessarily how to discern. This is when we first understand the physical laws of the universe, have our first experiences solving problems, and develop our early social skills. Senses of security, confidence, and compassion are formed - either positively or negatively. The golden rules from this time period - "Do on to others as you would have done to yourself" and "Share nicely with others" - will never change.

PHASE II: Getting Experienced

Life is a series of first times for everything, and this is the time where many of the "defining" experiences occur. Generally, this phase begins for most people as they come of age in their adolescence. One's ego and confidence has been built up to the point that they feel ready to make some of their own decisions about the way in which to live their lives. People are thinking for themselves on some level, and this is usually expressed in the testing of boundaries and some questioning of authority. People at this stage get to experience the causes and effects of their chosen actions and to learn from them. People

connect with their peers on a deeper level as they share their experiences. Familial beliefs, once taken for granted, may be challenged by friends. This stage often continues through high school and college, as preparations to enter the “real world” begin. It doesn't end there, though. Many people will believe that they have “found themselves” at this point, especially if they fall into a routine that works for them and is respected by their peers. They feel satisfied with their world view and will not go any farther on the journey.

****LIFE CRISIS****

This is a very common time for what we'll call the “Life Crisis.” For many years in our culture, this stage was likely to occur in middle age and was more commonly known as a mid-life crisis. However, due to a variety of factors, people are feeling disillusion and having a life crisis at younger ages – sometimes as early as high school or college graduation. Life seems to have no meaning. The goals and ambitions that society encourages do not seem to be fulfilling or in many cases, even possible. For many others, this is a crisis of integrity. Their experiences have taught them about how the world really works and on some level they want to be ignorant again and not have to take responsibility for the information that they possess.

PHASE III: Getting Re-educated

One of the discoveries that is common during the life crisis period is that much of what we have been taught or think that we know, can

and should be questioned. We are now wise enough to tell the difference between knowledge and wisdom. Knowledge can be learned from others. Wisdom comes from your own experiences and from what you've taught yourself. The two must be discerned and kept separate. On your journey, your wisdom will be of much more use to you.

The re-education phase is in full motion when you become analytical of your education and experiences up to that point and start to ask questions about them. Everything that has been learned from others previously, including everything that is taken for granted, must now be questioned with an opened and unbiased mind. One needs a non judgmental mind in order to learn and accept new information. Certain fundamental beliefs about religion, politics, worldview, and societal expectations might already be set in stone and are uncomfortable to challenge. One must not be afraid of the answers that come from inside.

Our consumer culture treats many important topics superficially due to their tangential relation to commerce and the economy. The environment, personal dissatisfaction, world history, nationalism, and foreign relations are such issues. They must all be reevaluated by an objective mind. The perspectives of all people and cultures all over the world should also be considered in your search for answers at this time.

PHASE IV: Getting Re-Experienced

This is a phase that requires you to take all of your newfound wisdom and incorporate it without fear or questioning into your daily approach to life. It is time to accept the inevitability of change and realize that you will always be learning and will never know everything. Your family and friends may think that this stage signals the beginning of a “new you.” However, this is not the case. Instead, you are taking steps towards the realization that how we define ourselves (to ourselves and others) is very limiting and is not actually who we really are.

PHASE V: Getting Humbled

For Western Seekers, this phase may be the most challenging. This is where the ego finally dies. All attachments must be left behind, even the attachments to the people around you whom you love. This doesn't mean that you are not caring, loving, or empathetic anymore. It just means that you no longer maintain any sort of co-dependent relationships. Your happiness must arise unconditionally from inside, and not be dependent upon the approval or happiness of others. This comes naturally as you let go of your ego and self image. How can anyone love or be loved more than anyone else, when everyone is just a part of the same whole? Love is an energy that we put out into the world, and we do ourselves a disservice by discriminating the directions in which we send it.

Your goals and your habits that make up who you think you are, also have to go. Initially, progressing through this phase can seem

heartless or even suicidal – but this is not actually the case. When you allow yourself to “cease to exist,” you are suddenly exposed to the true shared nature of existence.

Without an ego, it becomes impossible to take personal offense to anything. You no longer have anything to prove to anyone, even yourself. A truly humbled person understands that one can not ever earn or deserve anything – good or bad. It also becomes clear that attaching oneself to their possessions or being attached to maintaining the status quo can only lead to suffering. Things are always changing, and to deny this is a certain way to bring on pain.

PHASE VI: Getting Satisfied

Once the ego has peacefully died, it becomes time to focus on the difference between wants and needs. Superficial wants, based on societal standards or peer pressure, should have disappeared along with the ego. Needs, on the other hand, can be stripped down to the most basic requirements for survival.

By now, the realization has occurred that everything in life is relative. Things could always be better and could always be worse. The trick is to be satisfied with the way things are at any given time. Things will change and will continue to change. But, if your basic survival needs are being humbly met – air, water, food, shelter, and community – you should be able to find your satisfaction.

With such satisfaction comes true peace of mind. The insecurity is gone that comes from being attached to things that could be lost. You stop asking yourself all the sorts of questions that can cause anxiety; “Am I reaching my potential?” “Do I fit in with my peer group?” “Do I have enough money?” “Are others judging me?”

PHASE VII: Being Happy

The last question you will ask yourself is “Am I enlightened?” You have NOT reached the end of the path when you answer “Yes” to this question. Instead, you will have reached the end of your journey when you realize that you no longer feel the need to ask this question any more. The seeker who has found what they are looking for, no longer seeks. And since the happiness that you are cultivating is unconditional and is coming from a humble place - that is as close as anything can get to being completely sustainable. With that knowledge comes all the security in the world, and with that security comes boundless positive energy that can now be both given and received no matter where you are or with whom you interact.

Being in the Moment

Consider a reel of film, like you might find in a movie theater projection room. Each individual frame of film is a single still picture – a captured moment. When projected at 24 frames per second, there is an observational phenomenon called persistence of vision. Rather than seeing each individual still frame for what it is, there appears to be coherent movement on the screen. A scene or an action may appear to have a beginning, middle, and end – but this is all illusion.

We live our lives with the same observational phenomenon in effect. Rather than experiencing each moment, one still frame at a time, our persistence of vision creates the illusion of time. It is easy to get lost in this illusion. We often feel responsible for our lives in the past, present, and future all at once.

The type of happiness that feels complete and fulfilling can only emerge in the present moment. This sounds obvious, but many people are caught up in mental loops that keep them from fully experiencing the present moment. They are constantly missing their present happiness while lost in other places in the human construct of time. They may spend their day looking forward to things, or worrying about events that will happen in the future. Or, they might spend their present looping about things that have happened in their past – either positive or negative. These thought patterns are being driven on some level by unconscious

dissatisfaction. The thinker wants to be somewhere else or be doing something different. This is the exact opposite of mindful happiness. When someone is in a situation where they allow themselves to be completely in the moment – for example, when they are caught up in the sensations of a roller coaster ride - there is no desire to think about other things that could be happening.

Without realizing how much they control their own ability to be in or out of the moment, everyone finds himself or herself in the moment from time to time. Sometimes it has to do with overwhelming physical sensations, like the aforementioned amusement park ride. While playing a sport like baseball, the batter is certainly in the moment when his bat connects with the ball. People are commonly in the moment when having an orgasm, or when they jump into a pool. Improvisational musicians or dancers must be in the moment by necessity. Being aware and in the moment are also the main goals of meditation.

In fact, many of the situations where people just “find themselves in the moment,” seem to be related to what our culture would refer to as diversions; rides, sports, sex, music, dancing, etc... It is, however, possible to make a conscious choice to be in the moment, no matter what you are doing. Some tasks may require great focus and mental energy – like doing complex math work. Other tasks can be done without focus at all – like sweeping the floor. Your responsibility to stay in the moment

is the same in all situations. Whatever you are doing, you can give the task your full attention and do your best to accomplish it. Allowing your mind to wander from the job at hand or letting yourself multi-task are the most common ways to slip out of the moment.

It is of the most importance to be self disciplined when doing things that you tell yourself you don't enjoy. If you know in your heart that you are doing what you need to do and that you are doing your best, your mind will release you from your "responsibility" to think about anything else. Time will then lose all meaning as you lose yourself in the work. Boredom also does not exist in the moment. For one to experience boredom, there must first be a frame of reference. In order to have a frame of reference, your thoughts must stray from the moment.

This practice seems like it could be hard to do. It is true that always being in the moment and experiencing the present to the fullest is not really encouraged in our culture. We are unconsciously taught that, as adults, it is our responsibility to constantly be thinking. There is always something that needs to get done. There is always something off in the future to either anticipate or worry about. The "to-do" list is never ending. It is subconsciously felt that not spending every moment in purposeful thought of some kind is somehow wasteful or neglectful of responsibilities. In addition, our culture conditions us to believe that life is a series of ups and downs – separated into times of play

and work. One who is in the moment is not a victim to these fluctuations in “life quality” or responsibilities.

Every moment is a gateway through which one can connect to the Singularity and find peace and happiness. Every room can be a temple. Every sweep of the broom can be an artist’s brushstroke. Even trash on the street can be beautiful, if perceived by one who is entirely in the moment.

Being in the moment does not mean that you do not recognize the effect that your choices may have on the future. In fact, the past and the future are very much part of the present moment. The more aware that you are of the moment, the greater your ability to see into the future. Imagine all of the weather on planet Earth, frozen at one moment in time. Predicting future weather patterns can only be done by observing the present moment. The more information that you can observe in the present moment, the more accurate your prediction will be. In the case of weather, we are observing storm systems, air pressure, or wind patterns. In life, we are aware in the moment of physical reality – but we can learn to be aware of the vibrations, patterns, and trends that point directly to future outcomes. If you are tapped in to all these energies and are aware in the moment, you can learn to more accurately see into the future.

Creating Your Reality

**If you want to view paradise,
Simply look around and view it.
Anything you want to, do it.
Want to change the world? There's nothing
to it.
– “Pure Imagination” from Willy Wonka & the
Chocolate Factory**

Reading the lyrics above, how did you create your reality? Did you recognize the song and sing the melody in your head? Did your mind wander off to memories of the movie or your childhood? Did you think about the message, and about what it might mean in the context of this book? Did you subconsciously dismiss the importance of these words because they originate from a song in a children's film?

Regardless of your answer, your perception and reaction were the results of choices made in the moment, as you were reading the words. When you have learned to be aware and mindful, you can make such choices consciously in the moment and proactively create your reality. No longer do you have to be a victim of your day-to-day circumstances or the judgments of others. Your happiness comes from within, as does your perception of reality.

Our moods and attitudes are often blamed on the actions of others, or by events that are out of our control. People “make us” happy or angry. Circumstances “make us” mad or provide pleasure. Happiness and security are

treated as temporary feelings and are fleeting. Instead of being a victim to external forces out of your control, you can take responsibility for every moment and create your own invincible positive reality.

The first step towards creating your own reality is to be aware of the fact that you have always been doing it, often subconsciously or habitually. Some individuals create a reality in which everyone is their potential enemy and no one can be trusted. Many others create a fantasy world that disregards the problems or happiness of anyone else in the world who is not part of their circle. Everyone consciously or unconsciously decides how “big” they want their world to be.

People are very good at creating ego based realities and then believing wholeheartedly in their creation. An ego based reality includes a created perception of yourself within your reality. This reality includes your definition of “who you are” and “why.” It is a reflection of memories, which are really just stories that you tell yourself to reinforce your existence and choices in the present. This is where all judgment of self and others originates. Being aware of this, and creating your reality in the moment without ego is the final step in the process of ego death.

We all need to be aware of our abilities to actively participate in our own reality creation. Then ego can be left behind and the Singularity can be experienced as reality. This experience

of the world is one of shared consciousness, awareness, peace, and positive energy. If we are to continue our spiritual growth as a species, as well as maintain a balance with the life supporting energies of our planet - this is where we have to begin.

Think of a moment in your past that you might refer to as a moment of peace and clarity. A time when you felt centered, balanced, and in the moment. A time when love completely overcame any fear. Ideally, think of a time when you let go of who you thought you were, and felt your place in the Singularity. Maybe this happens for you in meditation. For some people, it happens in a relaxing shower or bath. Others may reach such a mental state through the spiritual use of certain intoxicants. People can find it out in nature, or while sitting in peace with their loved ones. Close your eyes and try to recreate that feeling in the present. Clear your mind of extraneous thoughts, and truly be in the moment. Be aware of your breathing. Find yourself calm and free of worry. Then, without needing any specific reason, allow yourself to radiate positive energy towards everything and everyone around you. Whenever you find yourself in such a state of mind, remind yourself to "START HERE" whenever you find that you have gotten into old habits or strayed from your path.

Now that you have a mental state from which to begin, all of your spiritual practice, all of your gathered wisdom can be applied in the present moment. You can then choose to

create a reality where:

- You find humble satisfaction with your present circumstances, and are infinitely happy. Any experience in the world is greeted with gratitude, wonder, and a desire to learn from it.
- You approach every situation without fear, and are prepared to accept negative situations with a positive attitude. You know that anger can be consciously changed into empathy, and that fear can be converted into bravery.
- You let go of your ego – especially all judgment of both yourself and others. You have nothing to prove. If others judge you positively or negatively, it should not affect you in the slightest. There are no winners, no losers, and no labels.
- Every situation, idea, or stimulus can be experienced as new in the moment. Preconceived notions about anything should be given little weight.
- Impermanence and change is embraced, while attachments are denied their power.
- Negative emotions become powerless over you, as you can recognize your state of mind as a choice.
- You have a respect for the Singularity and for the natural world from which we evolved. Existing with love, peace, balance, and positive energy is of the utmost priority.

- You see beauty everywhere, and do not fall into learned patterns of criticism.

Energies

To create your reality without ego and to no longer feel the need to “express yourself” does not mean that you don’t exist or continue to have social responsibilities. Life does not exist solely in your mind and no man is an island. Interpersonal relations and exchanges are crucial in your realization of the Singularity. You are one with everything, not just yourself. But how can multiple egoless people exist together and relate in a situation where personalities and personal motives have been deconstructed?

The answer lies in an understanding of energies, the vibe, and your consistent contributions to each. In fact, making positive choices that put out constructive, rather than destructive energies is the primary responsibility of the enlightened individual in everyday life. While concepts of right and wrong or good and bad often exist in gray areas, there is no such confusion with constructive or destructive energies. Constructive energy is positive, creative, and selfless. The only motives behind constructive energy are to send love, encourage peace, or to create art for the sake of beauty. If you can think of any additional ulterior motives for your choices or actions, they are neither selfless nor constructive.

Destructive energy ranges from mild forms (defining yourself by things that you “dislike”) to much more dangerous incarnations (mental or physical violence directed at others.) What all examples of this type of energy have in

common, however, is that the ego is built up by the behavior rather than let go. Criticizing others and the choices that they make is a way to feel better about your own choices. Antagonistic behavior or choices made in anger are often just coping strategies for fear or are ways to feel power over others. All these actions lead away from shared peace and the Singularity. An enlightened mind recognizes all behavior as choices, and sees no benefit to the output of destructive energy.

There are many ways in which positive energy can be sent from person to person. A peaceful attitude and a smile may be the simplest forms of positive communication known to our species. Singing, dancing, and other expressions of joy are also forms of communicable positive energy. The purest forms of positive energy are communicated without words. Words are often too abstract or are used to disguise motives.

Send your love and positive energy out equally and without judgment to everyone around you. If the people you encounter don't understand your unconditional love or choose to return it, it should not affect your positive choices or your commitment to the vibe. If a person who is not used to getting a hug from an acquaintance has it happen enough times, they may finally open up to the idea and may even have a revelation about their learned boundaries.

If someone sends you destructive or

negative energy for whatever reason, do not react in a negative way. Anger, resentment, and offense are never going to be beneficial. Instead, convert their negative energy to positive energy by attempting to understand the internalized pain that the person has chosen to express. If they are not conscious of their negative choices, you may sympathize with them and hope that they become aware of what they are doing to themselves. Practice remaining unmoved from your peaceful state, in situations when confronted with negative energy. Any time it happens, see it as a challenge to your spiritual practice and an opportunity to grow. Great satisfaction and peace can arise when you realize that you do not have to be victim to the negative energy inflicted by others. Their negativity should not be tuned out or ignored, but you can choose not to vibrate on their frequency and continue to make your own positive choices about your attitudes and actions.

One interesting way to model the Singularity and the energy exchanges in our world, is to conceptualize an ocean.

How big is this ocean? That is a relative question. Tiny ripples would appear as tidal waves to a microbe on the surface, or the whole ocean could resemble a teardrop from a vantage point in deep space. In the egoless world of the energy field there is no one observing, and therefore, no perspective to be had.

The water is symbolic of the energy field

itself, of which we are all a part. Imagine each being with free will in the world as a tiny particle, suspended in the flow under the water. These particles are unique and special. While they are somewhat at mercy to the overall movement of the water, they can still individually vibrate over a wide range of frequencies. Some particles are in control of their vibrations, some are attempting to do so, and a third group just believes such control to be impossible. But they all still vibrate, just about all of the time. The vibrating particles send complex ripples through the water. If groups of particles vibrate at similar frequencies consciously or unconsciously, they can influence and amplify each other's effects. Those collective ripples can become currents or even waves in the ocean. How big are the waves? This is also a relative question, and like before, no answer is meaningful.

One can also see with this model, how the energy field transcends time and actually achieves the apparently unobtainable human goal of immortality. Freeze the ocean in a single moment in your mind. Study the shape of it – the surface waves and the underwater currents. This shape, in any given moment, contains every vibration that has ever come from any of the particles at any point in history. The previous influence of any one individual particle, big or small, is detectable for all time on some scale. It may seem that some particles vibrated enormously and had tsunami size effects, while others may have vibrated so little that nothing seems to be out of place. However, it can not be stressed enough that the size of anything in

this scenario is completely relative, and therefore meaningless. As you grow to understand that your contributions (no matter what “size”) permanently become part of the energy field, you can feel yourself merge with the infinite and immortal, knowing that your positive vibration will resonate through all time.

Existential philosophies that lead people to seek fulfillment by having a large impact, or by wielding power and influence over others are shown to fail in this model. The size of an impact only exists in the eye of the beholder and requires an active ego in order to have a perspective. It is very hard to ever reach the end of the existential journey – one could always be more famous, have more power, or influence more people. The few who do reach their lofty and often arbitrary goals often find that they are still not satisfied with their achievements or that they now live in fear of losing what they have gained. True permanent personal fulfillment can only be found when one is satisfied by whatever part they are playing in the whole, regardless of the relative size.

Another interesting metaphor for one’s contributions to the energy field is that of a musician playing an instrument in an improvisational jazz or jam band.

You are born and given an instrument to play. Not everyone is given the same instrument to start, and different instruments will require different levels of diligence and dedication to master. Life circumstances can be

random in this way. In the end, of course, it is just the music that will matter. The sooner that individuals stop thinking about their struggles with their own instrument and begin to focus on the overall quality of the music made with others, the sooner they will find peace and realize the Singularity.

In early childhood, you learn to play your instrument slowly. You are just learning how to communicate in a language that everyone can understand – in this case, music – itself a confluence of vibrations and energy. You grow used to the feel of your instrument and keep it tuned, learning to recognize pure tones and harmonies.

As a young jazz musician, much time will be spent learning the standards. These are the common themes and recognizable patterns that have been developed and passed down from generation to generation. Like anything in nature, these songs have evolved over time and have survived natural selection, remaining relevant and important in society and culture over time. This is why history and traditions are important to respect before attempting improvisation.

Practice is crucial. You must find the balance between having fun experimenting and disciplining yourself with lessons. You need to learn how to listen to your own voice. Practicing the instrument can also be equated to your spiritual practice. Be honest with yourself about how much time you spend every day in an

attempt to connect with your greater surroundings in a spiritual way.

Soon you will find yourself playing in groups with others. Sometimes your band will just be a small combo. Other times, you will be playing with a large orchestra. Despite the fact that everyone may be playing something different and that no one may necessarily be listening to one another, there is always just one song being played at any given time and place. At the best of times, everyone in a group is playing together, each contributing their own part to the whole and creating a vibe and harmony.

Some people may play aggressively and loudly, wanting to stand out in the band. Others may play in a quiet, shy manner - afraid or intimidated to contribute for whatever reason. A lot of people just play the same things over and over again, without thinking about it at all.

It is your responsibility to be mindful of the song being created in the moment by all those who are playing it. Know when it's time to be part of the rhythm section. Then listen for your time to solo. Recognize the moments when it may be your contribution to conduct the band and lead them to play in harmony. No matter what the music is sounding like, always play your best and attempt to enjoy whatever seems to be working in the song.

In post-modern music, there is an understanding that any one instrument can

acceptably be played with any other – regardless of how it may have been done in the past traditionally. Any genres or styles can be mixed with some degree of success. This is a relatively modern enlightened and open minded view that applies to both music as well as interpersonal relations. Anyone can learn to play with anyone else and create music. Cultural traditions and differences should not discourage collaborations. In fact, they often enrich the end result.

Finally, when everything is being done right, you will begin to improv effortlessly. You will hear yourself play in perfect tempo and harmony, without thinking about what note comes next or what direction you are going. You are completely in the moment, floating in a zen space of peace. Millions of musicians throughout history have come to understand this state of mind. Skill level has nothing to do with it. Someone could enter this level of awareness and connectedness, playing just one note at the right time or a steady percussive rhythm on a crude drum.

When we are aware of and in control of the harmony we generate with others, the highest of potentials can be reached by the individual, the group, and the group of groups that make up the energy field entire.

Dream Consciousness

There are clearly different states of consciousness through which we pass. In one form, you are awake, dealing with everyone and everything in our shared world. In another, you are asleep, and living through your dreams. In yet another state of consciousness, sometimes reached through meditation or with the use of certain drugs, you can temporarily visit outside your constructed mental prison. It is a chance to peer objectively into both your subconscious and the collective mind. It is a way to experience reality in a very different way. Our society generally has a very straightforward attitude when it comes to respect for these different forms of consciousness: the only one that counts as reality is what happens while everyone is awake and shares the experience.

It is often taken for granted in our culture that individual experience and perception are meaningless in the context of the real world. When someone dreams, apparently nothing has actually happened, because the experience was not shared with others. People don't think before saying that the events in their dreams never actually "happened." But of course they did, in the mind of the dreamer. Why shouldn't the dream experience be considered real to the person who had it? If anything, the fact that the experience was generated entirely from their own subconscious should make the dream MORE MEANINGFUL to the person than the random everyday occurrences of their "real" life. We all can learn a great deal by self

psychoanalyzing every single one of our dreams and by taking them seriously as things that have happened in our lives. Dreams are legitimate memories of experience, and contain many very real life lessons for you to decipher.

There are indigenous tribal cultures in which dreams are shared with the group every morning as real experiences. Everyone participates in a form of group psychoanalysis and the dreams of the individual become the shared experience of the community. The dream events are considered to be as real as anything else going on in their world. The individuals' subconscious mind and the collective unconscious in general, were therefore a part of their reality. Our modern culture has lost this practice, and with that, the experiential knowledge that comes from living in that world.

Once you begin to give your dreams the respect that they deserve, you will find that they become much more powerful. When you direct energy towards your subconscious, it can be awakened. It almost seems to know that it is being taken seriously and it will open up to you. Lucid dreams, where everything seems tangibly real, become more common. Eventually, it is possible to consistently "awaken" during a lucid dream and have conscious manipulation of the events. Complete control over everything does not necessarily seem possible or desirable. You are still in the playground of the subconscious and that commands respect. However, you can take control of various elements. Most of all,

you can be in control of your emotional state and reactions. While your dream reality may never be fully under your control, you are able to control how you choose to perceive and interpret everything. Situations that feel negative for any reason can be diverted. Fear can be dispelled by the reminder that you are just dreaming. After you become aware of this ability, you have the revelation that there is no reason to believe your powers only exist in your dream state. Even while awake, you always have the ability to create your perception of the world, even if you can't change everything in it. Suddenly, there is no need to differentiate how you act or react in your dream state and waking life. Your newfound self control that developed in the safe arena of dreams, still exists when you are awake. Your dreams are now real places where you can both continue to live and learn.

There are some ways in which you can help direct energy to your subconscious in order to encourage lucid dreaming. One of the primary ways to begin taking dreams seriously is to start keeping a dream journal by your bed. First thing upon waking, write down as much as you can remember and the feelings associated with the dream. The more you do this, the easier it will become to remember your dreams and interpret them. Many people have their dreams interrupted by alarm and instantly begin to face time sensitive responsibilities and a serious day of work. This is a very sad reality in our society. More respect is deserved for our visits with our subconscious mind.

Another way to encourage lucid dreaming is to stop what you are doing at any time of the day and ask yourself out loud “Am I dreaming right now?” Don’t just say it, but actually really consider the question. Come up with reasons to prove to yourself that you are not asleep. Keep in mind that dreams can sometimes feel very realistic. Make this check a part of your everyday routine. It will then become very common that you will start doing it without thinking in your dreams. Something in the ongoing dream reality will trigger a suspicion in your unconscious mind that things might not be as they seem, and your conscious mind will instantly respond with your well worn catch phrase – “Am I dreaming right now?” The answer usually comes as a bit of surprise when it turns out to be true, but what results is an instant lucid dream that is now in your hands. This is an important skill for people to learn, if they are to fully grasp their mind’s potential.

There are plenty of things that interfere with the pursuit of lucid dreams as well. Other than the habitual disruption of dreams, it also seems that peace of mind and feelings of security greatly influence one’s ability to have a dream where they feel in control. When we don’t live in the moment and worry about all sorts of things that we can’t control, it weighs on our subconscious. Our dreams then become a dumping ground for all of the negative or trivial energy with which the subconscious mind is being suffocated. People might dream about mundane work, loop on old memories, have recurring bad dreams, or just play out seemingly

random tasks taken from their routine. When people feel generally secure and have a still and peaceful mindset, they feel generally in control of their day to day. This makes them much more likely to realize the same control in their dreams.

Taking certain drugs can also interfere with the pursuit of lucid dreaming. Abstaining from all drugs while undergoing this learning process is advisable. This has to do with the way that drugs work in the mind, in regard to neurotransmitters. When ingesting a psychoactive drug, the effects in the brain are not exactly caused directly by the foreign agent introduced. Instead, the drug is usually affecting the release or reuptake of various neurotransmitter chemicals that are already present in the brain and are part of everyday brain function. These chemicals are actually what are producing the perceivable effects of the drug. It seems as if serotonin especially is directly related to dream consciousness, so drugs that affect the supply of this neurotransmitter will interfere with your abilities.

Legal and Illegal Drugs

The similarities between dream consciousness and a psychedelic drug induced type of consciousness are very noteworthy. Both are connected to similar neurotransmitters which are naturally in the brain. Both involve glimpses into the subconscious mind. The visions, thoughts, and revelations that appear in the drug consciousness are just as relevant and important as those in your dreams. The experience and perception of reality still originates in your mind and comes from you, not the drug. Just like in your dreams, you can awaken while on psychedelics and take control of the direction of your trip. A great deal can be learned in this state of mind, as this form of consciousness feels more objective than a dream. We often identify ourselves as the first person player in our dream state. In the psychedelic state, that obstacle is removed.

Before continuing on about the potential uses and misuses of drugs in relation to a spiritual journey, it is important to define exactly what a drug is. If it is something ingested that affects brain chemistry or inner body functions, then just about everything we eat, drink, or breathe is a drug. Why should the drug have to be ingested? Doesn't television alter brain function? Aren't video games addictive? What criteria are being used to decide what drugs are good, and which ones are bad?

There seem to be patterns when it comes to the scheduling of drugs in our society.

Certain drugs are allowed or encouraged – not because they are safe, but because they result in predictable thought patterns, behaviors, or have a built in punishment for abuse.

Caffeine and sugar encourage aggressive and energized behavior. Despite health implications and addictive potential, they are not even treated as drugs and are present everywhere for constant consumption. Coffee is served up at the workplace, with the intention of keeping everyone drugged to a certain degree. With similar results, stimulants are given to children in the form of ADD medication as well.

Alcohol (which, of course, hasn't always been legal in the U.S.) is allowed for escapist recreation, partially because of it has a built in punishment for abuse: sickness and a hangover. Mainly it is legal because the amount of money flowing through that industry has long helped keep it legal and functioning. Cigarettes are also legal, due to the industry profits. Health risks clearly have nothing to do with making drugs legal or illegal. People who make the argument that alcohol and cigarettes are legal due to the public's "right to make their own choices," don't often apply the same logic to other drugs.

Anti-depressants and codeine based painkillers are also legal and are now extremely common – both in prescription and abuse. This was predicted by Aldous Huxley in his dystopian "Brave New World", where the population is all drugged to be docile and predictable.

Why are the various illegal drugs actually illegal? What are the histories of these laws and what histories did these drugs have prior to modern civilization? What might some of the unspoken reasons be for the repression of certain natural psychoactive substances?

Drugs that have strong effects in addition to high addictive potential - like the opiates, cocaine, and methamphetamine – need to be approached very cautiously. These drugs can be very unhealthy for the body, and (in certain cases) can also lead to isolating or destructive behavior. Some people insist that there are some psychological benefits to experimenting with these drugs – yet it should be noted that there are many other substances that have a better and more tested history of aiding humanity than these powerful stimulants and painkillers.

LSD and Ecstasy (MDMA) have potential spiritual benefits if used correctly. But even though both of these drugs are very powerful and have been used successfully in therapeutic clinical trials to treat alcoholism and depression, we are not discussing them extensively due to their synthetic nature.

Naturally Occurring Psychedelics

The only class of drug yet to be mentioned is the naturally occurring psychedelic, such as psilocybin mushrooms, peyote and similar psychoactive plants. These are illegal drugs that are too often stereotyped as dangerous, but in fact may be extremely beneficial to humanity at this moment in time. These are not new drugs – they have been used for at least tens of thousands of years.

It has even been theorized that the introduction of mushrooms into the diet of early man may have played a major part in the evolution of the human mind and the birth of spirituality in our species. To see how this could be possible, we need to again conceptualize how our brains work.

Many people picture their brain as a sort of “constructive machine.” It seems to work similar to a computer, taking in various bits of information and linking relevant things to one another. There may be a better way to model how the brain works, however. This other model will be more helpful in understanding how psychedelics could have assisted in the spiritual evolution of the human mind.

Picture your brain instead, as a “destructive machine.”

A huge amount of information is being sent to the brain at any given time. All five senses are engaged and are in communication. There

are sensations constantly coming from nerves all over the body. Visual information alone is overwhelming in detail. The function of the brain as a “destructive machine” is to block out information signals that are not immediately relevant. We are taking in a great deal more information than our mind allows us to process at any given time.

At a certain point in our early history as a species – when one might say that we were more animal than man – we were evolving, and the fittest were surviving. Logically, the most likely successful procreators would be the ones whose brains were the most finely tuned for survival. Considering the brain as a destructive machine, their minds would be shutting out information and stimuli that were not related to finding food, mating, or avoiding predators. There would be no real survival benefit to purely intellectual or spiritual pursuits, and the human brain was evolving accordingly. Man did not yet yearn to create art just for the sake of beauty, nor did they likely conceptualize themselves as spiritual beings. Many animal brains still seem to function in this same manner.

When early man came out of the trees and moved from the forests to grasslands, the population likely came in contact with animal dung and the psychedelic mushrooms that grew upon it. These would have been incorporated into their diet, and completely new perceptions of reality would have been introduced. On mushrooms, the destructive machine brain loses some of its ability to discriminate and can no

longer automatically interpret the signals it is receiving. Unable to function on autopilot, the mind necessarily wanders into all new patterns of thought, inspired by the new way of seeing the world. The brain becomes unhinged from the “survival mode” in which it evolved. The loss of ego, increased sensitivity, and feelings of connection with the rest of the universe – all common effects of the mushroom – could have then been part of the development of many complex human emotions and behaviors that are unrelated to simple survival; the appreciation of beauty, empathy, and spiritual ecstasy. In other words, psychedelics could have been connected to the spiritual birth of our species.- maybe the most significant advances in the consciousness of our planet.

Ritualistic use of psilocybin mushrooms, peyote, or other similar natural intoxicants has been commonplace and considered of the utmost importance by many civilizations in the past. Why does modern Western society feel so threatened, that these plant teachers must be made completely illegal?

First off, some of the myths need to be dispelled about these substances, for the psychedelics are often lumped in with harder drugs and the risks associated with them are often exaggerated. Despite the fact that one can develop a habit or pattern involving almost any activity, the natural hallucinogens are definitely NOT physically addictive. In fact, with the hallucinogens, daily use isn't usually desired by the Seeker, nor is it particularly effective.

Also, in the case of these psychedelics taken at proper dosages, there is no confusion of hallucination with reality. Perception is most certainly altered, but the tripper is fully aware that they are in an altered state – there is no mistaking the hallucinations for physical reality. Many of the publicized cases of people thinking that they could fly or being overwhelmed by what their mind has created are cases of major overdose, or experimentation with synthetic chemical versions of these naturally occurring drugs, which can be much stronger. Other potential occurrences, like that of the “bad trip,” have more to do with the mindset and experience of the person taking the drug, than the drug itself. If possible, would dreaming be banned because of the potential of having a nightmare? In any case, there is as much to be learned from a bad trip, as a good one. This is not to say that there is no danger in experimenting with these substances – this just means that the substances need to be given proper respect and not taken carelessly or for purely hedonistic reasons. A careful and slow approach is recommended, with an experienced guide or teacher helping lead the way. This is traditionally how it has usually been done in most cultures, and the most common problems attributed to these drugs do not often result from this approach. Rituals have evolved naturally involving these substances, and these rituals continue to exist for a reason.

There is a common misconception that people can “lose control” of themselves on psychedelics. This is not actually what is

happening. A good allegory is that of a child who suddenly wakes up and realizes that they are in the driver's seat of a moving car. Before this revelation, they have been unconsciously on autopilot all the time. You don't lose control on psychedelics, rather you realize that you are suddenly awake AT THE CONTROLS of your body vehicle and are fully responsible for your trip and your perceptions of reality – just like in a lucid dream. The realization can be instantly overwhelming to those who arrive at this point with no guidance or assistance. Like the aforementioned child, they may swerve all over the road and crash the car. It can be too much responsibility for the unprepared Seeker, especially if they fight the dissolution of their ego and try to maintain their sense of self throughout the process. That usually results in self conscious paranoia, along with fear that they are dying in some way. There is the fear that things won't ever be the same again. Your ego itself can actually be a trigger for the proverbial "bad trip."

There are, of course, preparations one can take to minimize the likelihood of a bad trip. It can be very helpful to approach the trip with clear intentions beforehand. Are you going to meditate in any way? Are you going to focus on the beauty that is going to be revealed to you, that exists in every object? Are you attempting to feel one with nature? Are you journeying with others, and does the group have clear intentions?

It is then important to focus on maintaining

of a positive mindset. The vibe of your setting should be carefully assessed, and you need to feel at peace in your mind. If you are taking an inward journey, eliminate all possible distractions, like your phone or clock. If you are taking an outward journey, as in a concert setting, prepare to send positive energy to everyone around you and also be prepared to flow with the energy coming from both the crowd and the music.

Another thing to be aware of is the possibility of having your mind get stuck in a loop. One thought, desire, or worry may surface and you may find it hard to think about anything else. If it is something negative, this can lead directly to a bad trip. There is a lesson to be learned from looping, however. Regardless of what the loop may be about, it is the responsibility of the tripper to learn to recognize a loop and change course. This skill is learned with experience and becomes easier over time, just like any mental exercise. The lesson is especially valuable, because it carries over into your everyday life. You learn to become aware of when your own mind is taking you out of the moment. You will recognize when you are consciously or even subconsciously looping on something - and will know how to put a stop to it immediately.

Once you have been “awake at the controls” - whether in a lucid dream, on a psychedelic trip, or deep in meditation – you gain a great power that you can be used on a daily basis. Whether awake or asleep, you can

practice actively participating in the creation and perception of your world.

A good correlation for the spiritual use of hallucinogens is that of the space program. Clearly there is a danger associated with space exploration, but it has been deemed worthy for humanity for us to take such risks in pursuit of knowledge and understanding. If we can apply that logic to the exploration of outer space, why not apply it to inner space as well? In the long run, understanding inner space may be more important to our survival as a species than our conceptions of the cosmos! We need disciplined “psychonauts” investigating the boundaries of our consciousness. These people need to be aware of the risks, open minded, and respectful of mindset and setting. Other cultures have been aware of the value of Shamans who take this journey to bring back wisdom and spiritual lessons. Once again, it must be questioned why such introspective investigation has been so repressed in our Western society and at what cost to our culture.

Buddhist traditions have insisted that drug use is not necessary for spiritual awakening, the loss of the ego, or the discovery of inner peace. In fact, drugs are discouraged without much question in the traditional doctrine. It is true that drugs are completely unnecessary on the path to enlightenment and may be detrimental if used simply as a shortcut to meditation goals, even if used with spiritual intentions. The argument can be made, however, that people in our culture have now reached a level of detachment from

both nature and each other, in which this aid to purposeful exploration may be even more valuable than before.

What effects do the hallucinogens have that are valuable to our spiritual evolution as a species at this point in time? For one thing, at the proper doses, they consistently produce a reflective awareness of oneself, and allow the Seeker to see beyond their own personal walls and ego - if they so desire. The connection to the Singularity becomes clear to people who are open to the concept at this point, and it is not easily forgotten after the trip. This type of detachment from self is one of the goals of meditation and the increased awareness is really what being mindful is all about.

When one's mind has been jolted from the everyday recognizable patterns that it counts on to subconsciously create its reality, one becomes more aware of the patterns that they themselves are perpetuating. Brand new perceptions of reality are extremely beneficial in helping to break bad patterns or habits. Back when clinical psychological studies were permitted involving psychedelics, success was commonly reported in the treatment of alcoholics. The thought patterns to which the alcoholics played victim were disrupted. As their own selfish egos dissolved, they were able to feel empathy for the people whose lives their drinking has negatively impacted, and were also able to feel their greater connection to all of humanity. This is a large part of the void that they had been trying to fill with alcohol.

Realizing that one is at the controls of their own world creation is very empowering to someone who has been used to patterns where they feel that they are a victim. The argument can be made that many people in modern society have mental states similar to those of alcoholics. Many have an addiction to escapist entertainment, a selfish trend of personal gratification, a lack of real empathy for all of humanity, a sense of isolation, and the feeling of being at the mercy of forces greater than oneself. This condition might be far better treated with empowering psychedelic therapy than with the array of anti-depressants and other traditionally accepted medications that will mask the symptoms, but will not necessarily bring about any new awareness or emotional progress.

In the psychedelic induced state, sensitivity and perception can be greatly increased in a variety of ways. The energies that others give off become crystal clear. The shared vibe in the setting is also amplified. Contributing to the vibe in a positive way, becomes an understood responsibility. All the previously mentioned minor forms of violence – sarcasm, gossip, and shadenfreude – will seem distasteful and useless in this egoless mindset. Feelings of connection with the natural world and all of the conscious life on the planet are also cultivated.

This mindset of increased sensitivity to the vibe and the Singularity represents the next step in the evolution of the human mind. It must take

place if our species is to change, adapt, and survive before we destroy ourselves mentally and physically. We have to rebuild our feelings of connection to the natural world and each other, or else we will continue recklessly along the path of environmental destruction, personal isolation, and self enslavement. This has been clearly understood by tribal Native American cultures, which are very conscious of their bond with the animal spirits and the Earth spirits that were part of their world. They have an understanding of the necessity to remain in harmony with these energies. If these energies are purposely thrown out of balance, it see it as a sure path to insanity on a both a personal and cultural level. This humility allowed their culture to sustain for generations, whereas our culture's rejection of humility and endless desire for consumption is leading us quickly down a path of destruction.

Misinterpretations of Native American beliefs trivialize their sensitive connections with the spirit world. Their belief system is characterized as being primitive, Godless, or unscientific. Consider this scenario, however. Imagine a Native American Shaman or a Seeker on a mushroom trip, who looks up at a large tree in awe. With egoless humility, they observe the spirit and energies of the tree itself. They feel its inherent authority as a wise ancestor who has prospered, living long and growing tall. They feel connected to the life energy of the tree, and recognize it as the same life force that flows through them. Even without fully understanding or considering the biology, it is clear that there is

a direct connection between the leaves of the tree and the sun's energy, despite the perceived separation and distance between the two entities. It is equally clear that the tree provides symbiotic energy for the other life forms that prosper around it and depend upon it – for food, for shade, or for shelter. Even in its eventual death, the tree will still be part of the whole and will continue its contribution to the world. The tree clearly does not just stand alone and separate from the Singularity. Things that we normally perceive as separate entities – the sun and the leaves, the natural world and our constructed habitats, humans and animals, the individual mind and the collective unconscious – all become clear as ONE entity that is interdependent on all of its parts. This entity has a shared consciousness and has a shared unconscious mind as well.

Just one glimpse of this Singularity can change a person forever. It is a perception of our co-existence that allows for no judgment, no fear, and no death. One who has felt that connection with the universe will also see the danger in the belief that the Earth's resources are primarily just there for human consumption. Such a person would also feel personally affected by human destruction of the naturally evolved ecosystems that we depend upon for survival. Considering the scope of everything of which we are a part, we need to wield our amazing powers of global manipulation in a much more humble fashion.

It becomes clear that our culture defines

our species as separate from the rest of the world. We have declared war on the natural world as well as upon each other. This is a war that can never be won, unless we abandon it and admit the following: Despite our best efforts, it will never be in our overall best interest to try and control everything in the natural world just for the benefit of our species. We are not Gods. We do not have the omniscient knowledge that would be necessary to maintain the natural balance of our planet's ecosystems and energies, and we never will have it. Our impact as a species on the planet must be minimized, and our lifestyle of consumption needs to change for peace to exist and humanity to survive. We need to be much more responsible with the power we now collectively have to make the planet uninhabitable for all life.

Maybe the likelihood of such revelations have something to do with why psychedelics remain illegal, even for experimental trials. Our economic system would be instantly threatened if enough people began to feel this way.

Personal humility and respect for the Singularity is absolutely NECESSARY for the survival of life on this planet. This is an enormous revelation for most people. It is a realization of a common knowledge that had been lost. It hardly deserves to be dismissed as a primitive belief system. Since our culture has no real traditions, rituals, or techniques that lead towards this crucial revelation, the incorporation

of psychedelics into our spiritual practice may therefore be beneficial to our very survival.

Marijuana

A much more commonly used drug in our society is marijuana. Like all the other drugs with potential spiritual benefits, marijuana needs to be used with spiritual intentions for any wisdom to emerge. Purely recreational use, or use just for relaxation purposes will not necessarily lead to any spiritual growth. It goes without saying that the abuse of this drug in such fashion is rampant. Of course, this should be expected, since our culture has no established rituals or publicly acceptable traditions for the teachings of spiritual use.

Marijuana might be best understood as a mild hallucinogen and has some similar effects to the ones already mentioned. Ego awareness and even loss can occur with high doses or particular strains. Sensitivity to all stimuli is increased as the mind's destructive filters are decommissioned. What is normally assumed to be reality is shown to be a fragile construct, just as with the use of the harder psychedelic drugs. With that revelation, the Seeker can go on to learn many of the same lessons about their personal responsibility for the perception of their world.

In addition to the mild effects which are similar to the stronger hallucinogens, marijuana has other reliable effects that may be of great value right now for spiritual healing in our society.

We live in a world where many have grown

accustomed to instant gratification. With all the entertainment and communication options that are constantly available at our fingertips, we no longer have to wait to make a phone call, get directions, look up a fact, see a picture, hear the news, or ask a question. Television images flicker past our eyes with faster editing and more colorful graphics than ever in history. Attention spans are becoming drastically shorter in both children and adults. Some people can even have trouble concentrating enough to read a book. Lack of some form of stimulation leads almost immediately to boredom. With hundreds of television channels, enormous music collections, funny online videos, and huge numbers of webpages available for perusal on the Internet – there is seemingly no time to focus in detail on anything in particular. There is certainly no additional time to focus on spiritual matters or the pursuit of inner peace. One is always going “on to the next thing.” Our brains have adjusted and adapted to this changing world, and now they function with the expectation of constant stimulation. This is the real cause of the modern Attention Deficit Disorder epidemic in our country.

Any serious journey down a spiritual path requires patience and concentration. One must learn to hear their own voice coming from inside, rather than rely on outside stimulation for the provocation of thought. Someone who has been totally immersed in our fast paced, information saturated culture, may have no experience slowing down or quieting their mind. Guided marijuana use could be very valuable to such an

individual. Left to their own devices, such a person could very easily just smoke pot and continue doing what they have always been doing. There is no shortage of people who use marijuana to escape thinking about anything, and will use it to zone out on some chosen form of stimulation. However, with the help of a guide or with great self discipline, choices can be made to use the drug in a different way.

Marijuana has always been a good “gateway drug” – although undeserving of the negative connotations that the label usually carries. When beginning your spiritual journey into altered states of consciousness, it makes sense to start slowly with a mild hallucinogen and to move at your own speed.

When people have their first experiences with marijuana (or really any drug, for that matter), their mental focus is drawn automatically to the physical effects of the drug as they begin to appear. These new sensations command their attention. For some Seekers beginning their journey, this may be the first time that they find themselves consciously listening to what their body is telling them. A new inner awareness is being cultivated in a mind that has been overwhelmed with external messages and trivial details.

The calming physical effects of the drug and the concurrent mood elevation help the Seeker find peace and satisfaction in the moment. This allows for their mind to slow down. It normally is racing to keep up with all of

the incoming stimuli. When the mind is caught up in the experience of the moment, it does not feel the need to worry about the future or loop about the past. The perfectly quieted mind is a rare condition in the everyday life of the over stimulated individual. Smoking marijuana as a short cut to experience a still and silent mind may be helpful to some people on their spiritual path. Other paths to this same goal, such as meditation or yoga, may be especially hard for someone who has not first cultivated patience.

With marijuana, even the most inexperienced Seeker can suddenly find themselves completely in the moment, mindful of their mental and physical state, along with feelings of satisfaction and peace. They may not yet understand their power to create this mindset whenever they desire, but they will now be able to recognize this approach to living – this place to start from - firsthand from experience.

Many of the dangers commonly associated with marijuana use are exaggerated or misguided. Looking back on the propaganda that was being spread about the drug at the time of its criminalization in the 1930s, it is hard to imagine that anyone behind the laws had any idea what the drug actually did. Films like “Reefer Madness” are infamous for their depiction of the “devil’s weed.” It could apparently make you psychotic, lose control, and even kill your friends. It is more likely to make you peaceful, satisfied, and encourages bonding between friends. The physical health

risks from the drug are minimal. No overdose deaths have ever been reported and marijuana use isn't linked to violent behavior choices. Compared to alcohol, marijuana seems downright safe in many ways. There is no potential for physical dependence, no physical withdrawal symptoms, and no hangover. While inhibitions may be lowered on the drug, no control is ever lost at any time.

Another common stereotypical accusation is that marijuana can make someone lazy. This is actually just a negative way of looking at one of the potentially positive effects of the drug. In a culture that offers an unsuccessful path to inner happiness – stressing motivation, achievement, and competition – perhaps a little “laziness” might be of spiritual assistance. Of course, it all depends on how the drug is being used. Relaxing the mind for a spiritual purpose is very different than using the drug to zone out on hypnotic television or engrossing videogames. Real spiritual introspection can only take place when both the body and mind are not distracted and in a relaxed state. Smoking in order to relax your mind for spiritual progress is hardly “lazy” or negative.

When marijuana is shared around with friends in a social setting, everyone in the circle is experiencing a similar high, from use of the same intoxicant. Each individual has a pretty good sense of what the others around them are feeling, how their minds are working, and the shared vibrations that result. How often does that happen in everyday life? The feelings of

connection and empathy that can result from those situations are important parts of understanding the Singularity. It is also often the case that people consciously or unconsciously put energy towards maintaining a positive attitude while smoking with friends.

Beauty and Art

Modern life exists in a material world of our creation. Human artifacts, buildings, and landscaping take up almost all of our field of vision and are part of most of our interactions as well. Doing an outdoor activity, such as taking a peaceful walk in the woods for spiritual purposes, is considered to be “getting out” or “escaping.” The material world is generally seen as separate from the spiritual world. This is yet another unfortunate cultural duality that can be perceived and overcome through meditation practices or psychedelic use. Every perceivable object can be a gateway into the spiritual realm. There is no difference between the aforementioned tree, and a plastic bag that is blowing in the wind. You can learn to see the Singularity through everything.

The ability to see the Singularity through any object, arises when all judgment has been abandoned. For example, our culture does allow one window from the material world to the spiritual world. This window is commonly known as ART. A painting or song has the ability to transport someone from one world to the other.

We can all agree that certain things are beautiful for whatever reason, and we all allow these things to transport and connect us to various degrees. We are conditioned, however, to be very judgmental when it comes to beauty and art. Our culture implies that all sorts of things must be considered involving an artist's pedigree, intentions and history. Society

declares certain things to be beautiful and others to be ugly. These are all trivial matters. It is up to you to make choices about your perception and it is possible to see the beauty in anything. Just the simple existence of an object can be beautiful. Imperfection is beautiful. We do ourselves a grave disservice to believe that the spiritual world is not accessible at all times in any place. We just need to stop judging, become mindful, and learn to be open in the moment.

Religion Vs. Spirituality

One of the great tragedies of our cultural heritage is that the spiritual development of the individual is far too often confused or corrupted by the closed-minded, group think mentality of the organized religions. People have forgotten how to tell the difference between the ideas taught by their inherited religions and their own personal spirituality. It is very possible to be spiritual without anything resembling organized religion involved. For example, the deeply spiritual atheists all around the world are many in number, but are often marginalized in public discussion. What people need to remember is that religions evolved in various cultures as a way for people to express their shared spirituality. We need to collectively adjust our focus to the feelings of spirituality that inspired the various religions, instead of the specifics of the religions themselves.

Many factors make organized religion very attractive to the masses. There are feelings of belonging when people are around others who are known to share the same belief system. There is a common culture and heritage that makes strangers feel closer, knowing that they instantly have many things in common. Traditions have evolved over time that exist to teach certain spiritual lessons. Such cultural traditions can strengthen familial bonds and provide a sense of continuity from generation to generation. Moral teachings, coupled with promises of eternal life in some sort of Heaven or Hell, have helped kept anti-social behavior in

check for centuries and have played a large role the development of modern civilization and laws. For the most part, attempts are also commonly made by local religious institutions to be charitable and to be a positive force within their respective communities. These are generally the “pros” of organized religion, if a judgment is to be made.

The peace and security that comes from giving your mind over to one of the paths offered through organized religion does come with a price, though. While just about any path can be followed towards spiritual revelations if your intentions are right, it can be dangerous to be involved in any situation where you are relieved of your responsibility to think for yourself and come to your own conclusions. You must approach your own spiritual journey understanding that no one knows all the answers, and you must be willing to trust what you discover to be true through your own personal investigation. Organized religions often claim to have all of life’s answers waiting for you, and offer acceptance and an easy journey to follow if you submit to their authority structure. This can be an uncertain path to personal spiritual revelations. In the end, it should be up to you to define for yourself what you consider to be holy or sacred.

Most everyone wants to feel accepted in some way and be surrounded by other people who share their values. You have to be careful, though, not to disconnect yourself from the rest of humanity by isolating yourself in a closed

mindful religious practice that excludes the spiritual ideas of others. Organized religions, often known for their resistance to change over the centuries, would benefit by remaining open and flexible so that our world's various spiritual beliefs can evolve and find their common ground. People need to come together rather than push apart.

Children are often indoctrinated into their religious beliefs at such a young age, that it can be a real challenge for them to even take the first step in questioning what they have been taught. At a time in their lives when they should have been learning critical thinking, religious authority figures may have asked them to blindly accept the existence of impossible miracles or literal interpretations of allegorical stories as articles of their "faith." The pressure to please these authority figures - or one's parents, extended family, or friends - can be enormous. Children are taught that their blind faith is a virtue, and in some cases, necessary for their eternal salvation or acceptance in their community. Logical thinking can easily be abandoned for pragmatic reasons in these cases.

Many other common religious teachings can also be detrimental to the development of healthy spiritual beliefs. In certain circles, it is implied that your own personal spirituality requires a mediator between you and God and that certain people are more "holy" than others. This ignores a fact that should be self evident - we all have an equal ability to directly connect to

the shared forces greater than ourselves in the world.

Some belief systems cast people as sinners who need to be saved. This way of thinking is often successful in spreading guilt and encouraging fearful obedience, but does not necessarily lead its followers to spiritual enlightenment. Belief in any sort of involved and judgmental God puts in place a metaphysical reward system for behavior choices. Living to please God and expecting to receive his favor in return, leads followers down a path of entitlement and judgment that is unlikely to guide them toward peace or satisfaction. If God can reward, then God must also punish. Fearing the punishment of a vengeful God is not going to be a positive path to connect spiritually to your world. Trying to gain God's blessing in order to spend an eternity in Heaven after death, misses the fact that Heaven can be found right here on Earth in any given moment by the individual who understands their responsibility and ability to create it.

In the worst case scenarios, people are taught prejudice and hate as part of their religion. Non-believers, homosexuals, liberals, other ethnicities, and even women have been common targets of religiously fueled hatred. Fundamentalists on all sides of the fences often feel justified in converting or killing others who have a differing spiritual world view. This is perhaps the darkest side of organized religion, and is a pattern that has played out again and again throughout the history of humanity. All too

often, people just shrug this observation off, ignoring the fact that these patterns continue to this day. In modern America, the label Islamic Fundamentalist is practically interchangeable with “terrorist.” Meanwhile, in certain parts of the Middle East, American Christian Fundamentalists are perceived as “infidels” who are out on a Crusade to convert them to another way of life. Both sides believe that killing is wrong – except when it comes to dealing with one another.

Religious institutions can often lead people away from a realization of the Singularity. When human spirituality is packaged and labeled by specific religious groups, it creates an “us and them” mentality among the indoctrinated. Humanity’s common ancestry, shared emotional perceptions of life, and our connected world consciousness are once again being ignored. Organized religion in the West is also more likely to fuel the ego than to humble it. Western belief systems often become a part of a person’s self created identity and also commonly encourage belief in an eternal soul – the ego that will never die. Clear perception of the Singularity requires a complete rejection of the importance and necessity of the ego in all forms.

With this in mind, ask yourself “Is there a God?” What is even meant by this question? Are we talking about the Judeo-Christian depiction of God? The American population today is nowhere near as sheltered from other ideas and cultures as all previous generations.

The world feels smaller than it has ever before. Almost everyone is aware that most of the world's population does not believe in this specific Judeo-Christian God or the mythology that makes up the related religions. If you first consider humanity's shared experience as living beings on the planet, it feels ethnocentric and arrogant to believe that any specific religion is right and that everyone else is wrong - especially because it involves your spiritual perception and judgment of your fellow human beings.

For the purposes of this book, we are approaching "God" as a word and a concept that you have to define for yourself. In that case, there is no need for debate about whether a specific God exists or not. You can start automatically with the premise that there is a "God" and now choose to explain what this means to you.

There are many things to consider when coming up with your definition. The Bible claims that man was made in God's image, in order to explain our intellectual differences and separation from all the other animals on Earth. The God depicted in the Old Testament also states that humanity has dominion over all of these beasts and that they are put here for our own use as we grow and multiply without boundaries. Already there are scientific and philosophical problems that arise from these concepts. If man was made in God's image, it is automatically implied that all evolution of all life on Earth has now reached an end point. Over

billions of years, life on this planet has continually and drastically mutated, changed, and adapted. Isn't it extremely presumptuous and narcissistic to think that this process has ended with human beings?

The concept that the universe intends for us to dominate all other life on Earth as we multiply is also troubling. This goes against how we understand ecosystems on the planet to evolve, function, and stabilize. To deny our connection to the rest of the life on the planet is detrimental towards gaining an understanding of the Singularity. In any case, the declaration that humanity has dominion over all creatures on the planet is clearly not true anyhow. Do people have dominion over microorganisms? At the time the Bible was being written, germs were not understood, and diseases were blamed on wrongdoing and wickedness. Our knowledge of the world has advanced over time, and there is no beneficial reason to have our religious philosophies remain static.

At various points in the Bible, God justifies taking slaves, occupying another's land, genocide, torture, and death as a punishment. In order to avoid assimilation into the heathen cultures, just about all forms of war and destruction are supported by the God of the Old Testament. The Ten Commandments state clearly the need to "love thy neighbor" and "not to kill." However, if we put these statements into the context in which they were written, it is clear that the message to the Hebrews at the time was that "Thou shall not kill other Hebrews"

and “Thou shall love thy neighbor Hebrews.” This seems like the type of unenlightened behavior that has been around since the infancy of Western Civilization.

The Old Testament also speaks of a “Chosen People.” To imply that God favors humanity over the rest of the animals on the planet is already an issue. To further imply that He favors certain groups of people over others, only widens the separation and divide that we feel from each other and which keeps the world from fully realizing the Singularity. How many wars have been fought between believers, in the name of their God?

Does your definition of God imply that He favors humanity over all other living species or that He watches over specific sects of people? Does your God encourage you to judge and punish your enemies? Does your God give permission to disrupt and exploit the ecosystems of the planet for your own benefit? If all these ideas seem spiritually deficient, what is left to include in a definition of God?

Some might say that God is love. Others might say that God is energy. This book will define God as just another word for the Singularity. This God does not intervene on anyone’s behalf - in fact, it is neither a separate nor conscious entity. This God is everywhere and is every part of every moment. We are all part of God as well, and it is our collective responsibility to perceive our world this way and act in a positive God-like way toward each other

and our planet. We can choose to show compassion and respect for all life in the universe. We do this in order to live peacefully and sustainably, hoping to reach our potential as evolving conscious beings.

Controlling People With Organized Religion

Organized religion has always had a hierarchy of authority that has been attractive to the rulers of nation-states throughout history. Forward thinkers in American history have learned from the past and have moved to separate the powers of Church and State, but this is a relatively modern advance in human social history. Until the end of World War II, Japanese citizens all believed their Emperor to have been appointed by a higher power. He had to come out after the war and confess to his people that he was not God. Even in more recent times, many religious people in the United States believed former President George W. Bush's claims that he was appointed by God to be in charge. Religion has been used by governments throughout history to justify their actions in the name of God, create obedience through fear, and have implied that the average person must turn to someone of higher authority to know what is the right thing to do.

The quiet subservience that the masses give to their religious leaders is identical to the type of submission that most governments and empire builders desire from their subjects. If the governing bodies are successful in convincing their people that they have the support of God or that they are Gods themselves, they gain control over the very souls of their populations. The laws of government and the laws of God become interchangeable and seem to carry the same authority. The emotions that motivate our behavior – love, fear, hope, and passion for life

– are filtered first through the Church and the State. When this has occurred, it is easier for a ruling class to maintain the status quo, keep behavior predictable, consolidate their power, convince the public to go to war, and control the spread of information.

Religious belief systems have been further corrupted by governing bodies to include a fervent nationalism. Nationality, like religion, is a label that we inherit at birth. We need to be cautious about using labels of any kind as part of how we perceive ourselves – especially if these are labels that are not of our own personal choosing.

Nationalism and religion combine easily together. In the United States, support for “God and Country” rings out from churches across the heartland and “God Bless America” is considered to be a national slogan. At an even greater extreme, the Israeli government expects Jews all around the world - even those who have never even been to Israel - to support their political policies and to take part in their national pride. Pride is considered to be a sin for a reason. All forms of pride fuel the ego, and national pride is no different than any other type.

If religion and politics were truly kept completely separate from one another, the general public might begin to think for themselves on certain issues. They might decide that the actions of their Government were spiritually deficient and they might choose to

disagree or disobey. Questions about the morality of nation building, resource wars, and the treatment of so-called enemies would be raised. Does anyone really believe that Jesus Christ would have been for war or discrimination of any kind? The Governing body of his era felt threatened by his growing popularity and his messages of peace and humility. He was killed for these exact reasons.

As scientific knowledge accumulated and advanced over the years, certain government leaders (who at the time were the religious leaders as well) began to feel threatened when the logic of science began to trump the explanations in the Bible of how we came to be and our place in the universe. These leaders had maintained their power by controlling the worldview of their subjects. Science had the potential to shatter that control by awakening people to the fact that religion did not have all the answers and that we were learning more about ourselves every day. Scientists were harassed, banished, and even executed for proposing ideas that contradicted Church doctrine. Over time, an educated public forced the Church to reluctantly incorporate all these concepts into their worldview. Knowledge is a component of freedom, as it is easier to enslave the ignorant. An educated public that desires to continue learning can break free of rigid, unchanging dogma.

Overall, organized religion has been an important part of the spiritual development of our species. We need to have respect for how our

belief systems have evolved over time. But just as astrology has evolved into astronomy and alchemy has evolved into chemistry, religion needs to complete its evolution into modern spirituality and philosophy. It then must continue to change with our advances in science and our collective learning experiences. In order to do this, we first need to overcome our attachment to our religions – or more accurately, our identification with them. If that happens, we will be able to perceive things objectively that we did not allow ourselves to see before. For example, that the only difference between an organized religion and what we might call a “cult” is really just the number of followers the group claims. It will also be clearer how money, power, and hypocrisy has corrupted the hierarchy of some organized religions over the years. We also may be willing to look closer at the history of our various religions and be more analytical of their origins and spread. How many people are currently aware that many aspects of the story of Jesus (the virgin birth, resurrection, etc) were part of the mythology for the Egyptian God Horus, centuries prior to Christianity? Our need for spirituality as an intelligent species is very great, but organized religion is not the only answer.

Mortality

No discussion of human spiritual development could possibly be complete without an acknowledgement of our mortality. Indeed, it is the keen awareness and understanding of our own mortality that sets our species apart from the other creatures that share our planet. It is a common source of fear and has fundamentally shaped many of our religions and philosophies for millennia.

Knowing that we all one day will die is glaring proof that the world will never be entirely under our control as Gods. Our mortality also “justifies” selfish actions that do not consider the long term effects on future generations. For example, previous generations would likely have been more concerned with sustainability, destruction of their environment, or the depletion of their resources if they felt that they would be around to experience the consequences of these choices.

Our inescapable mortality and short lives have kept us blinded in many ways. The only way to remove these blinders is to confront and embrace our mortality instead of fearing it. Choose to experience love in the moment, rather than choosing to live in fear of loss fear of the future. Do not fight the inevitable. Never forget to be accepting of impermanence and change.

As discussed earlier, once the ego is dead there should be no pressing desire left for

immortality. This is not because you have necessarily learned to let go of the attachment to your own life, but because you have gained an understanding that the consciousness and energy field of which you are a part is inherently immortal and that your impact is permanent - regardless of its relative size. No energy in the universe is ever created or destroyed - it just changes form.

It is our lifespan that sets our time scale, ignoring the fact that the universe operates on a very different scale. Things that seem very long ago by our measurements in decades or even generations have occurred in just an insignificant flash in time by universal standards. The two hundred years since the founding of the United States – or even the ten thousand years since the development of agriculture – mean nothing when compared to the billions of years our universe is known to have been in existence. It is detrimental to our understanding of our world (and our subsequent philosophies) to not take into account this obvious fact. On the universal time scale, even the appearance and evolution of our species is a relatively recent occurrence – not to mention how quickly the world human population has exploded from three hundred million people (less than 700 years ago) to close to seven billion today. Keep in mind that six billion of those people have appeared in just the last two hundred or so years. The fact that this type of exponential growth can not continue for much longer before we have overrun the carrying capacity of the planet, is immediately apparent

to anyone who looks at it from the universal perspective. Developing a realistic worldview and a modern spiritual component must take this into consideration.

Humanity is now at a crossroads. Up until this point in the history of our species, mankind had the ability to live in a fantasy of their own creation. If an entire culture wanted to define their time scale based around the average human lifespan, the resulting philosophies could be workable and acceptable for general success and survival in the world. However, due to issues like the aforementioned exponential growth in population and the depletion of our natural resources, we are quickly losing our ability to make up our own rules as we go along. There are serious issues that we must confront both philosophically and physically if our tenure on this planet is to continue into future centuries. Part II of this book will address many of these problems that exist in “Outer Space” – outside of the prisons and playgrounds of our minds. Before it will be possible to proceed, we must choose to mentally evolve and master our “Inner Space.” Hopefully, the ideas presented here in Part I will at the very least encourage introspection that will assist down that path. Let’s all continue this discussion, publically and privately, as we search for truth together.

Preview of START HERE Part II: Outer Space

"Reality is that which, when you stop believing in it, doesn't go away." - Phillip K. Dick

NOW AVAILABLE

Chapter 1:

Understanding Energy and Peak Oil

Understanding Energy and Peak Oil

Higgins: It's simple economics. Today it's oil, right? In ten or fifteen years, food. Plutonium. Maybe even sooner. Now, what do you think the people are gonna want us to do then?

Joe Turner: Ask them?

Higgins: Not now - then! Ask 'em when they're running out. Ask 'em when there's no heat in their homes and they're cold. Ask 'em when their engines stop. Ask 'em when people who have never known hunger start going hungry. You wanna know something? They won't want us to ask 'em. They'll just want us to get it for 'em!

- The Three Days of the Condor

There is a strong consensus trance operating in today's society. A large majority of people do not question humanity's ability to continue to grow in population exponentially forever. People often take for granted that the future will resemble the present, but with more

advanced technology. They also expect that human ingenuity will make up for shortages of resources, energy supplies, and destroyed ecosystems. Because no one seems to question our ability to continue to play God and survive, no one feels the need to ask the questions that need to be asked or face the fears that need to be faced.

In order to grasp the predicament that humanity currently faces, the single most important thing to understand is ENERGY. A relatively small percentage of Americans currently understand how energy works or how oil drastically impacted world population growth over a very short period of time. Even fewer people understand the meaning or ramifications of worldwide “peak oil.”

The first step in understanding energy is to look at the first law of thermodynamics. It states that energy can be transformed, but can never be created nor destroyed. Energy exists in many different forms as heat, fuel, biomass, light, and so on. It can be converted from one form to another. For example, using chemical energy gained from food, you could rub your hands together, converting mechanical energy into heat energy. Of course, the energy in your food had to originate from somewhere. Assuming that the food was a steak, the energy within it came from grass eaten by a cow, which converted its energy from the sun through photosynthesis. The way it works on our planet, ALL of our energy at some point originated within our sun.

The energy found in oil, gas, and all forms of fossil fuels also naturally originated with the sun in the same way. In fact, it is fair to say that we have a gigantic savings account of compressed sunlight energy under the ground. About one hundred and fifty years ago, as soon as we realized the potential for this energy resource, our civilization put it to use. Having a large boost in the energy available to a growing society is no different than introducing a large and consistent stream of food. Looking at any world population growth chart, it is not an exaggeration to say that the growth since our discovery of fossil fuels has been exponential and unprecedented.

Prior to the Agricultural Revolution about 10,000 years ago, there were never more than fifteen million people on the planet at any given time, due to the natural balance that was in place between man and his food supply. Agriculture offset that balance, and by 1800, there were approximately one billion people on the planet. Not long after, humanity discovered how to use fossil fuels as an energy source, and the population shot up to almost seven billion in just two hundred more years! At some point in the not too distant future, this growth will have to stop in one way or another. There is a breaking point somewhere in the carrying capacity of the planet, and some would argue that we are well past this point already.

When trying to determine the breaking point, the importance of the energy we are

receiving from fossil fuels must be considered. At whatever point our non-renewable fossil fuels actually run out, the inevitable result is that billions of people will have to die. They will die of starvation – technically energy starvation. The only reason our population was able to reach seven billion people is because of the fossil fuel influx of energy. This can not be stressed enough, and any population growth chart that is laid over a chart of our energy usage easily demonstrates this. Eventually, with our “savings account” depleted, we will depend on our daily allowance of energy from the sun. That energy will enter the food chain and be captured by a certain number of plants that will only be eaten by a certain number of animals, whose numbers must now be smaller than before. Of course, humans are included as animals within this food chain. There will not be food for seven billion people in a post fossil fuel era. It has been estimated that a world population of around one to two billion at most might be able to sustain, since that was the number we had reached before the influx of fossil fuel energy.

Fossil fuels haven’t just allowed our population to grow exponentially, they are also at the core of what we might call the “American Way of Life.” Unchecked energy consumption is at the heart of our economy, our food supply, our transportation, and arguably – what some might call our freedom. Of course, it’s not just America. The entire civilized world is more or less guilty of making a series of non-sustainable choices.

Nutrient rich fertilizers require large amounts of natural gas. Since farms no longer rotate crops and the soil has been abused over the years, it would be impossible to get good crop yields without the use of such fertilizers. Pesticides that protect the crops are also made from petroleum. Tractors, irrigation systems, and farm equipment all run on fossil fuels, as do the trucks in our entire national food distribution system. Without oil, our entire food system collapses.

If there was a shortage of oil, mega stores like Wal-Mart who deal with bulk shipments of cheap goods from overseas would see their profit margins disappear when shipping those distances becomes too expensive. The largest employer in the US will have to close stores rampantly and will take down with them every small town where they have already destroyed local businesses.

Oil shortages would make it impossible to live in the far out suburbs and commute any sort of distance for work. At first, the fuel prices would make it very hard for people to sustain. We are already at this point, Keeping the roads maintained and safe would become the next issue. Eventually, even having access to a car would become rare. In other words: Having a house out in suburbia, driving the SUV to a job in the city, getting cheap fast food, and shopping at Wal-Mart are all very heavily oil dependent. Some would call that the American Dream. In pursuit of this dream, Americans consume 25%

of the world's energy supply, despite only having 5% of the population. This is what makes the American way of Life possible.

How long have we got before we are out of oil and these scenarios become likely? The first thing to realize is that there will be major social upheaval, economic collapse, and the likelihood of world war long before the world runs out of oil. This mostly has to do with the concept known as Peak Oil.

Worldwide Peak Oil is a phenomenon of geology and physics that occurs near the point at which about half the oil on the planet has been used. Consider this: When any individual oil field is first tapped, the oil is under a lot of pressure. The oil that comes out first is the light crude on top. It is the easiest to extract and also the easiest to refine. Sometimes, it takes almost no energy to extract the oil – it just comes gushing up out of the ground. As the well is depleted, it costs us more and more in terms of energy to get the oil out of the ground. Water has to be injected to build up the pressure in the well. The oil that does come out is a heavier crude that is harder to refine. The drills have to go deeper and the process gets exceedingly more complicated and energy intensive. At a certain point, the increasing energy cost starts to notably offset the energy we are getting from the oil itself. Essentially, it costs oil to get more oil, and the price is always rising. At a field's peak, the largest amount of net energy possible to gain has been reached. Trying to exceed that amount of net energy gain (usually measured in

“barrels per day”) will not work. From that point forward, there will always be a decline in the number of net BPD that are possible to produce from that field. When put on a chart, the energy returns always resemble a parabolic curve, with “peak oil” for that field occurring at the top of the curve.

What is true about an individual oil field, can also be applied to a country’s entire supply as well. M. King Hubbert, the Shell Geologist who first raised the issue of peak oil in the 1950s, predicted the U.S. domestic oil production peak to occur between 1965 and 1970. He was ridiculed as a doomsayer, but he turned out to be right. The U.S. peaked in 1970. Since that time, production has declined from our domestic fields every year, as the parabolic curve would predict.

If you consider all of the world’s oil supply together, then there must also be a peak around the halfway point. This is the infamous “Worldwide Peak Oil” which caps off our maximum net energy available from the planet in the form of fossil fuels at any given moment. From that point forward, decline in production on a worldwide level is inevitable. Whether or not peak oil will occur is not a question. The only controversy is in predicting exactly when this will happen. In 1974, Hubbert predicted the worldwide peak to occur around 1995. Of course, he was unaware of future oil discoveries and advancing technology that could move the date. The North Sea oil that came online in the 1980s and more fuel efficient technologies

certainly helped to delay world peak oil. However, his prediction would not be far off. No major oil field discoveries have occurred in decades. Ghawar, the largest oil field in the world, located in Saudi Arabia, seems to be past its peak. If that is true, then the world is past peak, without question. It can be hard to tell exactly when the peak has been reached, because we can only tell in retrospect after a few years have passed and the decline is easy to chart. At this point in 2011, all indications are that the worldwide peak happened sometime within the last five years. The International Energy Agency, a Paris based autonomous intergovernmental organization established in 1974 in the wake of the 1973 oil crisis, has said that conventional crude oil production peaked in 2006.

The modernization of China, coupled with the industrialization of India puts a very heavy new demand for oil on the market. This makes it even more likely that we are reaching that point when world daily demand exceeds world daily supply, and former “swing producers” like Saudi Arabia can’t just turn the spigots anymore and increase their output.

We are just now beginning to see the impact of peak oil, first in the form of economic collapse all around the world. The world economy is based on a model of infinite growth. Sustainability has never been the goal. For things to appear “normal” in the United States, at least a small percentage of growth is necessary every year. It is just about impossible to find an

economist who believes that an economy can continue to grow normally when faced with diminishing energy supplies. Because of peak oil, we can expect the current recession to continue to worsen and a full recovery to past levels to be impossible.

The lie being sold to the public is that the current economic crash is due to the bursting of the housing bubble, complicated financial tools like derivatives, and irresponsible lending. The truth is that our government has long been aware of the approach of peak oil. If anything, the low interest rates and easy financing that caused the housing bubble to inflate were a pre-emptive response to the upcoming collapse. These loans drove our economy through the last decade and served only to delay the inevitable. The entire economy is set up like a pyramid scheme, using fractional reserve banking, fiat currency, and compound interest to create money out of thin air. When economic growth becomes impossible, the wheels come right off – just like any other pyramid scheme. That is primarily what is happening right now, and it is all related to peak oil. We are already witnessing constantly rising gasoline prices and social unrest all over the world. Eventually we will see major power outages, food riots, and worldwide violence escalating.

At times like this, war should not come as a surprise to anyone. The U.S. has acted preemptively to establish bases in the Middle East, with a secondary goal to install friendly governments that will secure the supply for as

long as possible. Care is being taken to make sure that oil remains traded on the dollar rather than the Euro, and also that any pipelines built through the region will not service competitors, like Russia or China. Want to know where the next wars will be? Just look anywhere that oil reserves still exist.

Vietnam is sometimes referenced as a historical precedent for today's wars in the Middle East. While there are similarities on a superficial level, a better example would be any of the wars fought by failing civilizations over the years, taking place due to a shortage of natural resources. This is the first time, though, that such a battle is being waged over the entire world's resources, and the outcome will affect modern civilization all over the planet.

Optimists often cite new technologies and market solutions to our energy woes. However, a closer study of how our economy currently functions should raise some concerns with those theories. In order for market solutions to naturally occur, commodity prices must reflect real intrinsic value. With that in mind, gasoline prices in America have been artificially low for decades. Many Europeans understand this. The fact that a gallon of gas costs less than a gallon of milk should be comical.

International forces have conspired for many years to keep the price of oil unnaturally low, in order to encourage the growing economies of the West and optimizing the situation for the Middle Eastern countries on the

selling end as well. Long term sustainability was never considered in setting prices.

Higher gas prices may encourage innovation and market solutions, but this becomes especially complicated when one factors in the fact that our economy becomes dysfunctional in times of real energy shortages. In general, people are also uneducated about our energy problems. If people are in the dark about the issue, the necessary human ingenuity for innovation won't be stimulated. We should have begun tackling this problem over thirty years ago, but no administration after Jimmy Carter's has dared to encourage anything that might resemble national sacrifice, disrupt our economy, or jeopardize the popularity of those in power.

Market solutions also depend on the concept of supply and demand. In a post oil peak era, the supply available each year will inevitably decline. Demand, to a certain extent, will also diminish as prices rise. However, it is extremely unlikely that the demand from the United States, combined with the demand from China, India, and the rest of the world will ever go down fast enough to ensure a consistent supply. The conditions are in place for an enormous worldwide economic crash – not a smooth transition to a new economy founded on the market solutions that such conditions are supposed to facilitate.

Now consider that the United States economy is mostly imagined. We no longer

have an economy that is based on manufacturing things of real value. We import our manufactured goods, the days of easy finance are over, and our economy is primarily a service economy. Our national trade deficit has skyrocketed since the turn of the century, and our national debt has exploded. The dollar is already crashing hard, and just watch what happens if it does not remain the world's reserve currency. What sort of solutions could we even be working on when we are broke and have no manufacturing capabilities anymore?

In any case, "green technologies" and alternative energy sources are not realistic solutions to our energy dependence. No combination of wind, water, solar, geothermal, or hydroelectric energy will result in the amount of energy that we are used to getting from fossil fuels. Bio-fuels, such as ethanol, require vast amounts of extra corn to be grown. It should be obvious by now that agriculture is extremely oil dependent, and ethanol production may actually result in a net energy LOSS. Hydrogen cars are far from being ready or safe, require lots of oil for their manufacture, and hydrogen is not actually an energy source anyway. We need to get realistic and start attempts to peacefully transition into a more sustainable lifestyle. We do this by changing the way in which we live, not by wasting time pretending that we can continue our current lifestyle with new technologies.

Major sacrifices involving our way of life need to be voluntarily made in the short term, if we are to work towards peace and a sustainable

society. Everything must be downscaled and made to sustain on a local level. This means no more automobile commutes to useless service jobs. It means that we no longer have the “right to have a car” or to travel easily around the world. Our unsustainable cities and suburbs must be redesigned to grow their own food locally. Many parts of the country that require huge energy, food, or water imports to survive (such as Las Vegas or Phoenix) must eventually be abandoned. Many others (such as New York or Los Angeles) will not be able to sustain the same numbers and must also downscale drastically. Businesses that do not directly contribute to the survival of humanity will need to close their doors. People all need to collectively step up and educate themselves on how to survive and be of value in this new world. This process will not be easy or instantaneous. It is unlikely to happen peacefully. However, it would be better to prepare for the future now while we still can, than to have it thrust upon us over the upcoming decades. Eventually, we will all be living primarily off of local energy and food resources, just as our ancestors did for millions of years.

**Here are the remaining chapters to be
included in Start Here Part II: Outer Space**

The Food Supply
Modern Fascism
*The Federal Reserve and the International
Bankers*
The Media
Big Brother
Cultural Conditioning
The Education System
Overstimulation and Technology
Sex and Violence
The Upcoming Test of Humanity
The End of Trusting Governments
Conspiracy Theories
Genesis and the Agricultural Revolution
Population Growth and Sustainability
The Georgia Guidestones

COMING SOON!